

COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT

THAILAND



Sasiwimon Warunsiri Paweenawat

Consultant, The World Bank

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Executive Summary

The objective of the Thailand Country Gender Action Plan (CGAP) is to guide the World Bank Group’s efforts to address gender equality challenges relevant to meeting the priorities of the Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Thailand, including strengthening the social protection and inclusion of vulnerable groups, and promoting quality education for all and talent management. In pursuit of that objective, the CGAP draws upon a diagnostic analysis of gender equality challenges and gender information gaps in the country, as well as national priorities and policies for addressing these challenges. The diagnostic documents areas of progress and areas where Thailand is lagging, either in comparison to other countries in the East Asia and Pacific region, or in the gender equality progress to be expected, given the country’s overall level of development. The diagnostic focuses on three priority areas: human endowments, including education and health; voice and agency; and economic opportunities. In addition, the diagnostic has taken into consideration the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic since February 2020 with major loss of livelihood among millions of vulnerable households that have fallen below the poverty line. This gender assessment thus includes an in-depth study to shed light on gender aspects and economic opportunities and constraints to employment for men and women, respectively, and links to population ageing and poverty.

Thailand has been successful in expanding women’s economic opportunities due mainly to country’s investment in girls’ education. Thailand’s 16 percentage point gender gap in labor force participation is lower than the average global gender gap due to the country’s relatively high female labor force participation rate (LFPR) (59 percent compared to the male LFPR of 75 percent). The country’s huge investment in education significantly contributed to the increased employment of Thai women. Thailand has achieved gender equality in education, with women having higher access rates to university than men. Thai girls significantly outperformed boys in all parts of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018, and the gender gap in learning outcomes is much higher than in the neighboring countries as well as in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

Thailand has also made remarkable progress in improving women’s health. While Thai women’s life expectancy has continued to increase, the fertility rate has decreased significantly, placing the country among those with the lowest average fertility rates in the world. However, adolescent pregnancy (ages 10–19 years) remains a chronic and unsolved issue in the country. While the share of adolescent pregnancy among the total number of women giving birth in Thailand has gradually decreased over 10 years from 16 percent in 2009 to 10.7 percent in 2019, Thailand still has a higher rate than the world average.

Thailand’s progress in improving human endowments as well as its structural economic transformation has altered the pattern of female participation in the labor market and shifted women from unpaid jobs in the informal sector to paid jobs in the formal sector. Compared to other developing countries, Thailand’s structural transformation from an agriculture-

based economy to a manufacturing- and service-based economy has benefitted women with jobs that have more flexibility and match their skills and abilities. Between 2005 and 2019, while the employment share of women in the agricultural sector dramatically decreased, their share in the manufacturing sector stabilized, whereas in the service sector it increased from 41 percent to 53 percent. Between 2005 and 2019, the share of women in low-skill occupations, especially those who work as skilled agriculture and fisheries workers, sharply declined from 56.8 percent to 41.1 percent. Thai women have shifted to work more in middle-skill occupations (increasing from 28.4 percent to 41 percent). Furthermore, the share of women in high-skill occupations increased, while the share of men dropped by 3 percentage points. Consequently, Thai women are more concentrated than men in middle- to high-skill jobs, predominantly as service workers.

Changes in occupations, especially the steadily rising trend of the employment of highly skilled women in professional jobs, and shifts in industrial sectors (as more women move to the service sector) contribute to the narrowing of the gender gap in Thailand. The overall gender wage gap in Thailand has diminished significantly in recent decades. However, there still exists a gender wage gap of 9–11 percent in informal employment, 4–6 percent in formal employment, and a large motherhood wage penalty in the country. Education is the main factor contributing to the large gender gap in informal employment; a large number of women in the informal sector have obtained only primary or secondary education and are employed in the agriculture sector, leading to low wages. Most of the informal workers are in the agricultural sector, living in rural areas and working in low-skill jobs. Although Thailand has a relatively ‘comprehensive social security system’, the majority of benefits cover only non-agricultural formal workers, and a large proportion of informal workers are not included in the system.

Despite this progress, there are several constraints to women working in the labor market, including household responsibilities, motherhood penalty, poor quality of employment in informal sectors, and limited accessibility to loans. Of workers who were not participating in the labor force in 2019, around 87.3 percent of prime-working-age women reported that housework was the main cause of their withdrawal from labor market participation, compared to only 16.3 percent of men. The parenthood wage gap (where workers without children receive higher wages than those with children) is persistent in the country and its negative effect on wages is evident. Furthermore, the motherhood wage gap is much larger than the fatherhood wage gap. In 2019, the wage gap between mothers and non-mothers was around 11 percent, while for fathers and non-fathers it was around 3 percent. In the case of female workers, the lower average wages paid to them after having children are due to their need to reduce their working hours to allocate time to raising children. Based on the societal and traditional norms in Thailand, Thai women are expected to be the main family caregivers. Mothers in Thailand hardly achieve a work-life balance due to the country’s lack of appropriate childcare support and proper childcare facilities. In addition, Thailand has no flexible working hours arrangement for mothers, causing some to draw back from the labor market, while others reduce their working hours, causing the motherhood wage penalty and difficulties in achieving their career goals. Furthermore, institutional factors, such as Thailand’s lack of paid paternal leave, as well as government assistance in raising children, could deprive women with children of employment in the labor market. The Labour Protection Act (No.7) B.E. 2562 (2019) extends maternity leave for female employees from 90 days to 98 days (with 45-day pay), and day leave also includes days taken for prenatal examinations. While the Thai government recently approved the draft Royal Decree for a paid paternity leave of up to 15

days for male state officials or male employees, whose wives have given birth, male employees in the private sector are still not entitled to paid paternity leave. In addition to taking care of their own children, taking care of elderly people is another major reason drawing women back from work. Over 50 percent of the Thai elderly reside with at least one married child, and most family caregivers for the elderly in Thai households are women.

The poverty rate in Thailand diversifies significantly with age and gender. Men's poverty rate is higher than that of women and the rate increases with age. The gap between men and women decreases gradually as they grow older. The poverty rate is highest for men at 75–79 years and women at over 80 years. The majority of the heads of households living under the poverty line are found to be male than female. The data also revealed that majority of these people have attained only a primary education, live in rural areas, work in the agricultural sector and in low-skill jobs.

Thailand is becoming an aging society, leading to an increasing share of extended families in the country. Over 50% of the Thai elderly live with at least one married child, and most family caregivers for the elderly in Thai households are women. Finally, with an increasing aged population, with the second highest percentage of elderly people among Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Thailand will inevitably encounter a shrinkage of its workforce. Fully utilizing the existing workforce and bringing back women who are out of the labor force should be a national priority in alleviating this problem.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit women hard, especially mothers, further exacerbating their disadvantages in the labor market. The number of employed people (prime working-age group ages 25–54 years) decreased for both men and women, while the unemployed population has increased, with women showing a higher increase in the number of people in the unemployed status (around three times more) and a significant increase in inactive status. Having young children had a negative impact on employment in the second quarter of 2020, with women affected more than men. The negative effect is higher for women who have young children, with a decrease of over 4 percent compared to over 3 percent for men. This finding is consistent with evidence in other countries.

While Thailand had made great strides in women's economic empowerment, challenges remain in female representation at the highest levels of decision-making. Even though Thai women represent a higher share of civil servants in government services compared to men, most of them work in lower-level positions rather than as managers and decision-makers. According to Office of the Civil Service Commission (2019), on average, women comprised 58.6 percent of Thailand's civil servants; however, women hold only 26.8 percent of management positions, and only 18.6 percent are high-ranking civil servants. Thai women hold 32 percent of senior leadership positions in the private sector, which is higher than the global average of 27 percent and the Asia Pacific average of 26 percent. Furthermore, women represent 24 percent of chief executive officer (CEOs)/managing directors as well as 43 percent of chief financial officers. Women hold 20.4 percent of board seats in listed companies, the highest rate among ASEAN countries.

In particular, Thai women are still underrepresented in terms of political participation. In 2020, only 15.7 percent of lower house members and 10.4 percent of senators were female. Out of 35 ministers, only 3 ministers were female (accounting for 8.6 percent of the cabinet), while there

was only one female governor in Nongbualampu Province, which is 1 out of 77 provinces (1.3 percent of Thailand's governors). The main obstacles to women in politics are societal attitudes toward women and traditional gender roles and perceptions of women in political positions, the lack of funding for women-led campaigns, and the political party system.

Unchanging rates of gender-based violence impede women's voice and agency. Over 16 percent of Thai women who are married, or cohabitating, have encountered domestic violence, including psychological, physical, and/or sexual violence. More severely, most of the incidents are unreported due to the stigma associated with gender-based violence and women's lack of knowledge of services. The Thai government passed the Domestic Violence Act, Victim Protection Act, B.E. 2550 in 2007, which was aimed at fighting against gender-based violence.

The following recommendations will help guide priorities for the World Bank Group to consider for the Country Gender Action Plan:

- (1) Improvements to the accessibility of quality childcare/elderly care services in Thailand could be the most significant tool in increasing the female participation rate. Full assistance should be made available to women with children to fully use their capabilities and enable them to pursue continuous careers.
- (2) Since the majority of Thai women and older workers are in informal sectors and low-paid occupations, the government must extend the social security protection coverage to this group and provide better working conditions and environments, as well as training to enhance women's capabilities.
- (3) The government should also focus on promoting equal working environments across genders, including highlighting women's right to work, and encouraging the eradication of the glass ceiling that women face in the workplace. A gender diversity policy (for example, gender quotas in the boardroom) should be implemented and enforced by the government.
- (4) There is high involvement in information and communication technology (ICT) access and e-commerce activities among the young generation of Thai women but low involvement among older people. An improvement in digital infrastructure and internet access and promotion of technical/literacy skills could provide new opportunities for empowerment, eliminate work barriers, and close gender gaps in all areas.
- (5) The government must actively encourage older workers' participation in the labor market. To solve the country's decreasing workforce, the government must extend the official retirement age and eligibility age for claiming old age pension to keep elderly workers in high skill jobs and in the formal sector. Providing more incentive schemes for older pensioners could also induce workers to work longer. This coverage should be extended to the elderly in the informal sector.
- (6) The COVID-19 crisis clearly hit women hard, especially mothers, due to the lack of adequate childcare services in both public and private facilities. Without a policy targeted at helping this group of women, this crisis may further widen the parenthood

wage gap and later worsen the progress toward gender equality. Therefore, a policy that makes provisions for support services for female workers through this crisis is needed.

- (7) Women are among the highest-risk groups due to climate change and are important stakeholders in reducing plastics and handling waste disposal. The government should work with development partners in forming gender-responsive disaster management, including gender aspects in climate-related prevention, mitigation, and adaptation policies and programs especially for women. In addition, the country needs laws and policies to incorporate gender-sensitive and responsive measures to tackle marine plastic production, waste management, and related health and safety issues. More gender analysis and research on different aspects of climate change and marine plastic management are needed to better inform policy formulation in these areas.
- (8) The extended conflict in the Deep South of Thailand has caused many casualties and affected men and women differently in many ways including emotional trauma, negative health outcomes, economic hardship, and domestic violence. As the government is a party to the conflict, there is need to strengthen state-civil society relations and capacity to provide services in these areas, especially to vulnerable groups, and address gender issues, including participation of women in planning and decision-making, and grievances of men and women affected by the conflict.

Introduction

The purpose of this gender assessment is to support the development of Thailand’s Country Gender Action Plan (CGAP) (FY21–FY22) and to guide the World Bank Group’s efforts to address gender equality challenges relevant to meeting the priorities of the Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Thailand. The diagnostic follows the framework of the 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development, with a focus on endowments, voice and agency, and economic opportunities. The first chapter is a country overview that outlines Thailand’s performance in global gender indexes and introduces institutional frameworks related to gender, including legislation, international obligations, and national policies and plans, and institutional mechanisms. Then the report presents deep dives into four areas: human endowments, voice and agency, emerging areas of concern, and economic opportunities. The second chapter on human endowments (page 11) details the progress in closing gender gaps in health and education outcomes, such as maternal mortality and fertility, as well as educational enrollment and attainment. The third chapter (page 25) presents trends in women’s representation in senior levels of the public and private sectors, as well as the status of women’s political representation. The fourth chapter (page 31) highlights emerging areas of concern, such as adolescent pregnancy, discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people (LGBTI) groups, and gender issues related to the conflict in Southern Thailand. Finally, the fifth chapter (page 38) analyzes gender gaps in employment, wages, and information and communication technology (ICT) access and explores constraints on women’s work. It also looks at the impact of COVID-19 in exacerbating these gaps. The final chapter (page 81) proposes recommendations for priorities that the World Bank Group could focus on moving forward.

(1) Country Overview

Key Findings:

- Thailand ranks midway on gender equality based on international indicators, but its performance is relatively low compared to that of some ASEAN countries.
- While the country has made progress in gender equality in most of the measured dimensions, Thai women are severely underrepresented in political empowerment.
- The country has improved its gender equality status in terms of employment legislation, but parenthood-related issues still require reform.
- Thailand has officially committed itself to women's rights and gender equality, both locally and internationally, through treaties and laws.
- The Women Development Strategy (2017–2021) is currently used as the key guideline for women's development and gender equality policy in Thailand.

(1.1) Performance on Global Gender Indexes

• Gender Development Index

Thailand is the developing country that has progressed most in the world Human Development Index (HDI) rankings from 2013 to 2018, indicating an improvement in four key indicators: life expectancy at birth, years of schooling (both expected and mean value), and gross national income (GNI) per capita. Thailand's HDI value (from the Human Development Report 2019) rose to 0.765 in 2018, placing the country 77 out of 189 countries and territories surveyed. The country's HDI value is higher than the average of countries in the high human development group of countries in East Asia and the Pacific and the neighboring Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries with similar population sizes (that is, Vietnam and the Philippines) (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 - Thailand's HDI and component indicators for 2018 relative to selected countries and groups

	HDI value	HDI rank	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2011 PPP US\$)
Thailand	0.765	77	76.9	14.7	7.7	16,129
Philippines	0.712	106	71.1	12.7	9.4	9,540
Viet Nam	0.693	118	75.3	12.7	8.2	6,220
East Asia and the Pacific	0.741	-	75.3	13.4	7.9	14,611
High HDI	0.75	-	75.1	13.8	8.3	14,403

Source: UNDP 2019a.

Thailand’s Gender Development Index (GDI) value is 0.995, placing the country in Group 1, which indicates high equality in HDI achievements between women and men. The GDI, which is computed from the ratio of the female to male HDI, represents the country’s progress in achieving gender equality in each HDI component indicator. However, Thailand’s gender equality score is lower than that of the Philippines and Vietnam, in which the GDI values are 1.004 and 1.003, respectively (Table 1.2). This lower score is due to the remaining inequalities in education and income. While Thai females outperform male counterparts in the dimensions of life expectancy at birth (women live on average 7.5 years longer), women still rank lower than men for average years of schooling and income (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 - Thailand’s performance in the GDI for 2018 relative to selected countries and groups

	Gender Development Index	HDI values	
		Female	Male
Thailand	0.995	0.763	0.766
Philippines	1.004	0.712	0.710
Viet Nam	1.003	0.693	0.692
East Asia and the Pacific	0.962	0.725	0.754
High HDI	0.960	0.732	0.763

Source: UNDP 2019a.

● Human Capital Index

Thailand is performing relatively well in the Human Capital Index (HCI) of the World Bank (2020a). “The index is designed to capture the amount of human capital a child born today could expect to attain by age 18, given the risks to poor health and poor education that prevail in the country where she lives.” (World Bank 2019). According to the 2020 HCI, Thailand ranks 63 out of 174 countries and scores 0.61 out of 1, representing a 0.01 point increase from its 2018 HCI score (0.60). Females generally perform better than males (0.63 versus 0.59) in these aspects: harmonized test scores, learning-adjusted years of school, fraction of children under five not stunted, and adult survival rates (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3 - Thailand's HCI and component indicators in 2020

	HCI 2020	Probability of Survival to Age 5	Expected Years of School	Harmonized Test Scores	Learning-Adjusted Years of School	Fraction of Children Under 5 Not Stunted	Adult Survival Rate
Thailand							
Male & Female	0.61	0.99	12.7	427	8.7	0.89	0.87
Male	0.59	0.99	12.8	413	8.4	0.88	0.82
Female	0.63	0.99	12.7	439	8.9	0.91	0.92
Philippines							
Male & Female	0.52	0.97	12.9	362	7.5	0.70	0.82
Male	0.49	0.97	12.8	354	7.2	0.69	0.77
Female	0.54	0.97	13.2	368	7.8	0.71	0.87
Vietnam							
Male & Female	0.69	0.98	12.9	519	10.7	0.76	0.87
Male	0.65	0.98	12.5	514	10.3	0.75	0.81
Female	0.73	0.98	13.2	524	11.0	0.77	0.92

Source: World Bank 2020a.

● Gender Inequality Index

Thailand is ranked 84 (out of 162 countries) with a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.377. The GII presents gender inequality measured in three main dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. While the country has performed well on maternal mortality ratio, it has performed poorly in the other indicators of adolescent birth rates, empowerment, education, and economic activity. Thailand performs more poorly than Vietnam in all indicators, except the maternal mortality ratio. Furthermore, only 5.3 percent of parliamentary seats are women, and only 43.1 percent of women have obtained at least some secondary level of education (compared to 48.2 percent of men) (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4 - Thailand's GII for 2018 relative to selected countries and groups

	GII value	GII rank	Maternal mortality ratio	Adolescent birth rate	Female seats in parliament (%)	Population with at least some secondary education (%)		Labour force participation rate (%)	
						Female	Male	Female	Male
Thailand	0.377	84	20	44.9	5.3	43.1	48.2	59.5	76.2
Philippines	0.425	98	114	54.2	29.1	75.6	72.4	45.7	74.1
Viet Nam	0.314	68	54	30.9	26.7	66.2	77.7	72.7	82.5
East Asia and the Pacific	0.31	-	62	22	20.3	68.8	76.2	59.7	77.0
High HDI	0.331	-	56	33.6	24.4	68.9	74.5	53.9	75.6

Source: UNDP 2019a.

Note: Maternal mortality ratio is expressed in number of deaths per 100,000 live births and adolescent birth rate is expressed in number of births per 1,000 women ages 15–19.

● Global Gender Gap Index

While Thailand has made progress in all dimensions in the Global Gender Gap Index (GGI), especially health equality, political empowerment is an aspect in which Thai women are severely underrepresented. Thailand has been placed as one of 32 countries where women currently represent less than 10 percent of ministers, as the country has no female ministers at all. The Global GGI (from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020) has been used as an indicator to keep track of improvements in gender equality in more complicated aspects of health, education, economics, and politics. Thailand's global gender gap of 0.708 places the country 6 in East Asia and Pacific and 75 in the global ranking (Table 1.5). Thailand has a similar performance as Vietnam but a much lower performance than the Philippines, which has been the country with the smallest gender gap among participating countries in Asia.

Table 1.5 - Global GGI, 2020

2020 Score	Rank (of 153 countries)	Gender gap Score	Economic Participation & Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health & Survival	Political Empowerment
Thailand	75	0.708	0.776	0.991	0.978	0.086
Philippines	16	0.781	0.792	0.999	0.979	0.353
Viet Nam	87	0.700	0.751	0.982	0.942	0.123

Source: World Economic Forum 2020.

● Social Institutions and Gender Index

Out of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) scores of 120 countries, Thailand has a score of 35.5 percent, classified in the group of countries with medium levels of discrimination (Table 1.6). The OECD Development Centre's SIGI (OECD 2019a) provides measures of gender-based discrimination, covering the four dimensions of discriminatory social institutions, including family discrimination, restricted physical integrity, restricted access to productive and financial resources, and restricted civil liberties that could affect women's lives in a country. The SIGI ranges from 0 percent for no discrimination to 100 percent for very high discrimination; thus, the lower the value, the lower the level of discrimination in that dimension.

Table 1.6 - SIGI, 2019

	Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019	Discrimination in the family	Restricted physical integrity	Restricted access to productive and financial resources	Restricted civil liberties
Thailand	35.5	33.4	22.7	25.2	56.8
Philippines	52.8	67.2	25.7	67.2	45.1
Viet Nam	25.3	23.3	30.8	32.3	13.8

Source: OECD 2019a.

However, women in Thailand experience a high level of discrimination in the subindex restricted civil liberties (56.8 percent), which is above the average in Southeast Asia (41 percent). Even though Thailand has no discrimination in the legal framework on freedom of movement (0 percent), the country has absolute and the highest discrimination in legal frameworks on civil rights (100 percent), as Thai women do not have the same rights as men to confer nationality to their non-citizen spouses (OECD 2019a). Furthermore, the country has high discrimination in women’s political voice as 95 percent of members of parliament are male, and Thailand has no legal quota at both the national and local levels to promote gender-balanced political representation, as 111 other countries in the world do.

● Women, Business, and the Law Index

Thailand is in the middle of the ranking (out of 190 economies) in the World Bank’s Women, Business, and the Law (WBL) index in 2020 (Table 1.7). The World Bank’s WBL (World Bank 2020b) investigates how the national laws of a country could affect the different stages of women’s working lives, from looking for a job until the final stage of retirement. Thailand has received a score of 78.1; a prominent note mentioned on country progress is the pay indicator, as the country has recently passed reforms to improve gender equality in employment, introduced by a new legislation that “mandates equal remuneration for men and women, who perform work of equal value.”

Table 1.7 - Thailand’s performance on WBL index, 2020

	WBL Score	Mobility	Workplace	Pay	Marriage	Parenthood	Entrepreneurship	Asset	Pension
Thailand	78.1	100	100	75	80	20	75	100	75
Philippines	81.3	75	100	100	60	80	100	60	75
Malaysia	50	50	50	50	40	0	75	60	75
Viet Nam	78.8	100	100	50	100	80	100	100	0

Source: World Bank 2020b.

The country performs well in all sub-indicators, scoring from 75 to 100, except for the indicator related to parenthood (20, which is much lower than the WBL index average score of 53.9). The parenthood indicator measures laws affecting women’s work during and after pregnancy, which is an area that the country must reform, and mainly covers the increase in the amount of paid maternity and paternity leave and prohibition of dismissal of pregnant employees.

(1.2) Institutional Frameworks

● Legislation

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2560 (2017)¹ Section 27 stated that “all persons are equal before the law and shall have rights and liberties and be protected equally under the law. Men and women shall enjoy equal rights.” This section mainly prohibited discrimination

¹ Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017. Published in the Government Gazette, Vol. 134, Part 40 a, Page 1, dated 6th April B.E. 2560.

and strongly asserted the equality of a person regardless of their sociodemographic background, including age, sex, education, and religious beliefs.

The Gender Equality Act, B.E. 2558 (2015)² Section 17 Paragraph 1 stated “Prescribing policies, ordinances, Rules, Notifications, measures, projects or procedures for State agencies, private organizations or any person which appear to discriminate unfairly by gender shall be prohibited.” This section prohibits unfair gender-based discrimination of all people, including men, women, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. In 2015, the Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558 was implemented to promote gender equality, solve unfair gender discrimination, and provide protective measures to those in need.

Following the act, the committee that promotes gender equality, called ‘Committee for the Promotion of Gender Equality’ or ‘the Committee for PGE’, contains four types of personnel: the Chairperson (Prime Minister), Vice Chairperson (Minister of Social Development and Human Security), eleven ex officio members, and nine members selected by the Council of Ministers. The committee has the following major authorities and responsibilities. First, it has the power to direct plans and policies to promote gender equality in both public and private sectors. Second, it can recommend policies or the improvement of certain laws to promote gender equality. Third, it has the authority to order instructions to assist people suffering from gender discrimination. Fourth, it can check or provide suggestions to state officials and agencies to execute the act. Fifth, it is responsible for promoting research related to the reduction of gender discrimination and gender-based data collection.

Additionally, based on the act, there is another committee called the ‘Committee on the Determination of Unfair Gender Discrimination’ or ‘the Committee on DUGD’ that has the authority and responsibility to deal with the issues related to gender discrimination, direct measures to solve unfair gender discrimination, provide researches on gender discrimination, coordinate with other stakeholders (individuals, agencies, and organizations) to prevent gender discrimination, and provide reports on the implementation of the act.

Finally, there is a ‘Committee of Fund Administration’ that is in charge of the ‘Promotion of Gender Equality Fund’. According to the act, the gender equality fund will be used for financing activities that promote gender equality, as well as for preventing the gender discrimination, helping and supporting people suffering from gender discrimination, overseeing and recommending the state officials and agencies on executing the act, encouraging researches relating to diminish gender discrimination, contacting and collaborating with other individuals or organizations, and any related objectives of the Committee for PGE. The Committee of Fund Administration has the authority and responsibility to manage the fund, both its maintenance and usage, which includes raising and spending the fund, managing the fund, and making sure that all activities comply with the regulations of the Committee for PGE.

² Gender Equality Act 2015. Published in the Government Gazette, Vol. 132, Part 18a, Page 17, dated 13th March B.E. 2558 (2015).

The Labour Protection Act (No.7) B.E. 2562 (2019)³ requires the employer to pay equal wage rates to male and female employees if their work performances are of the same nature, quality, and quantity or equivalent value. The act also extends maternity leave for female employees from 90 days to 98 days (with 45-day pay), and day leave also includes days taken for prenatal examinations, which is in accordance with the standards under the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protection.

The Thai government recently approved the draft Royal Decree for a paid paternity leave of up to 15 days for male state officials or male employees, whose wives have given birth. The leave period could be taken anytime within 30 days of their child's birth. However, male employees in the private sector are still not entitled to paid paternity leave; the employers have the right to decide whether to offer paid/unpaid paternity leave to employees or not.

The Family Development Promotion and Protection Act B.E. 2562 (2019),⁴ which replaced the earlier Domestic Violence Victim Protection Act, B.E. 2550 (2007), intends to prevent family violence, which extends its definition to any harm against the body, mind, health, dignity, and reputation, and protect the welfare of family members, defined as people who live in the same household. In addition, this new law has strengthened protection for women victims of domestic abuse and for criminal prosecution.

● International Obligations

Thailand has officially committed itself to women's rights with international treaties and laws since 1985 when the country became party to the key United Nations treaty on the subject: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Since 2015, Thailand has adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including SDG 5, which addresses gender equality.

According to the Government of Thailand's National Review Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) (1995) and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly (2000) in the context of the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the BPfA 2020 (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development 2020), Thailand has become party to seven of the nine core international human rights treaties and joined a number of international and ASEAN agreements on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment as follows:

- **ASEAN Agreement.** Thailand has adopted key instruments on women's rights under the ASEAN Framework such as the Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children; the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW); the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and SDGs; and the Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) in ASEAN.

³ Labour Protection Act (No.7) 2019. <http://protection.labour.go.th/>.

⁴ Family Development Promotion and Protection Act 2019. http://asean-law.senate.go.th/en/law-detail-en.php?law_id=3269&country_id=9.

- **The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 WPS (2000).** To promote the role of women and their involvement in creating and maintaining sustainable peace and security, the Thai Government has adopted the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS (2000) and implemented the United Nations resolution 1325 by forming a subcommittee on women and the promotion of peace and security in the country in 2012. Various activities were conducted including increasing women's awareness about their rights and promoting women's equal access to justice and legal advice in the country.⁵

At the policy level, the state initiated a greater focus on the participation of women in creating sustainable peace and security. In 2015, the consultation of the resolution and implementation for Thailand was held among relevant government agencies, UN Women, the Human Rights Commission, Southern Border Province Administration Centre, and civil society groups. The draft policy and strategy on women and promotion of peace and security was submitted to the National Committee on the Policy and Strategy for the Advancement of Women and was approved in 2016 (Marddent 2015).

Then, the country conducted practical workshops and coordination of the main government organizations (that is, the office of women's affairs and family institutions and Ministry of Social Development and Human Security) together with other related organizations such as UN Women, the National Human Rights Commission Southern Border Provinces, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and representatives of women's networks from civil society (Marddent 2015).

● National Policy and Plan

Thailand built a long-term strategic plan by establishing the 20-year National Strategy (2018–2037) for achieving long-term national development goals, and the five-year National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) (2017–2021) for use as a policy guideline to measure performance and budget allocations. The Thai government has integrated the BPfA into the Women's Development Plan under the NESDP since 1997, in which the Women Development Plan or the Women Development Strategy (2017–2021) is currently being used as the key guideline for women's development and gender equality policy in Thailand.

Under the Women Development Strategy (2017–2021), the top five national priorities to promote the role of women and girls for the upcoming five years are

- (1) Changing gender attitudes and stereotypes toward women by focusing on the media and academic sectors;
- (2) Eliminating existing gender-based and domestic violence against women and girls;
- (3) Evaluating and developing measures to implement gender-related needs with Gender-Responsive Budgeting;

⁵ Peace Women 2020. <https://www.peacewomen.org/content/thailand-15>.

- (4) Promoting women's right to work and rights at work by providing an equal working environment for women with measures such as tax deductions, arrangement of breastfeeding and childcare rooms, and allowing paternity leave; and
- (5) Supporting women entrepreneurs and women in enterprises by improving their skills through the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs' Network of Thailand.

In addition, the elements of SDG 5 are incorporated in the country's Women Development Strategy (2017–2021). The Constitution of 2017 calls for Gender-Responsive Budgeting (Section 71) paragraph 4, in which a pilot project was implemented in Surat Thani Province (OECD 2017).

● Institutional Mechanisms

The Government of Thailand's National Review Implementation of the BPfA (1995) and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly (2000) in the context of the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the BPfA 2020 (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development 2020) outlined the institutional mechanisms to promote gender equality and women's empowerment as follows:

The Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development (DWF) is the main authority for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women in Thailand, which is the result of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security restructuring in 2015. According to the Ministerial Regulation on the Organisation of the DWF of 2016, the DWF is responsible for laws, policies, strategies, plans, mechanisms, and operational standards relating to gender equality, women's empowerment, and the promotion and protection of women's rights and assignment of sex at birth.

The National Committee on the Policy and Strategy for the Advancement of Women, chaired by the Prime Minister, was founded in 2008 by the Regulation of the Office of the Prime Minister on the Promotion and Coordination of Women's Affairs at the National Level. It includes representatives from various sectors, including public, private, and academic institutions. Its duties include proposing policies on women's improvement and submitting suggestions on the effects of legislation, policies, national plans related to women's empowerment, and gender equality in the Cabinet.

The Chief Gender Equality Officers (CGEOs) and Gender Focal Points (GFPs) were introduced by the Cabinet in 2001 to enhance the consistent operation of government agencies on women's affairs and gender equality.

The National Women Assembly is organized by the Royal Thai government established in 2008 to improve the role of women in policy making, improve women's access to information, enhance the implementation of women-related policies, and provide suggestions and guidelines on women's affairs.

The Thai government founded a **Multi-Stakeholder Working Group** with the mandate to create a road map to promote and localize SDG 5 in 2017.

The Thai Women Empowerment Fund (WEF)⁶ was established in 2012 by the Prime Minister to promote women’s development, address gender equality, and raise women’s potential in every aspect. There are four main objectives of the fund: (a) to provide zero or low interest funds for women in business; (b) to take care of women’s issues and support their development; (c) to support female-related activities; and (d) to promote other programs that have the goal of empowering women.

The WEF is available to all females over 15 years. There are two types of the WEF: revolving funds that allow members to borrow at an interest rate of 3 percent a year for ‘career development, job creation, and income generation’ and subsidy funds aimed at promoting women’s life condition and knowledge. In 2015, the Thai Government founded other WEFs and merged them with the original one in 2016. Currently, the Community Development Department (CDD) of the Ministry of Interior manages the WEF, which is associated with the Thai Women Development Plan in the 12th NESDP (2017–2021) to help the empowerment of women.

⁶ <http://www.womenfund.in.th/>.

(2) Human Endowment

Key Findings:

- Thailand has made remarkable progress in improving the population's health and education endowments for both men and women.
- The fertility rate in Thailand has been decreasing significantly over time, placing the country among those with the lowest average fertility rates in the world.
- Thailand has become an aging society with the second highest percentage of elderly people among ASEAN countries after Singapore.
- Thailand has achieved gender equality in education; women have higher access rates to university than men.
- While Thailand's student scores in PISA 2018 were low, Thai girls significantly outperformed boys in all parts.

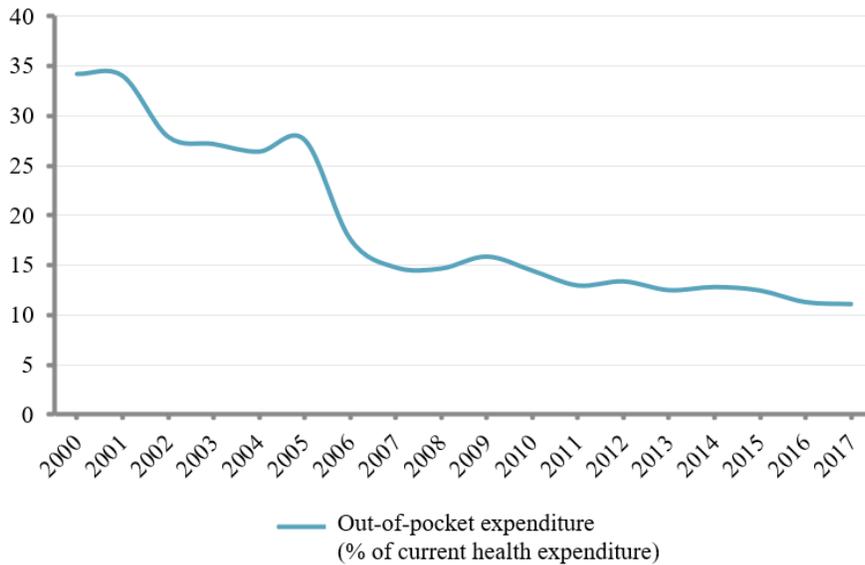
(2.1) Health

- Overall

Thailand has made significant progress in improving the population's health outcomes over time. The government has implemented several policies to improve the health of women and children, including the benefit package for maternal and child health and health services during the preconception period and the antepartum, intrapartum, and postpartum periods. The majority of Thai citizens (over 48 million) are covered by the Universal Health Care (UHC), a tax-funded scheme introduced in 2002. This scheme allows Thai people to access medical care regardless of their financial situation. In FY2020, the UHC was funded by a THB 191 billion budget (equivalent to THB 3,600 per person) (Bangkok Post 2019).

The UHC has been a good example of investment in health to reduce the financial burdens due to the health expenses of Thai citizens. Since its introduction in 2002, out-of-pocket expenditure for Thai citizens (percentage of current health expenditure) has declined, from over 30 percent to 11.1 percent in 2019⁷ (Figure 2.1). Furthermore, the Thai households covered by this program increase their savings and future consumption, causing the welfare effect mainly by improving consumption smoothing (Hongdilokkul 2017).

⁷ World Health Organization Global Health Expenditure Database.
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.OOPC.CH.ZS>.

Figure 2.1 - Out-of-pocket expenditure (percentage of current health expenditure)

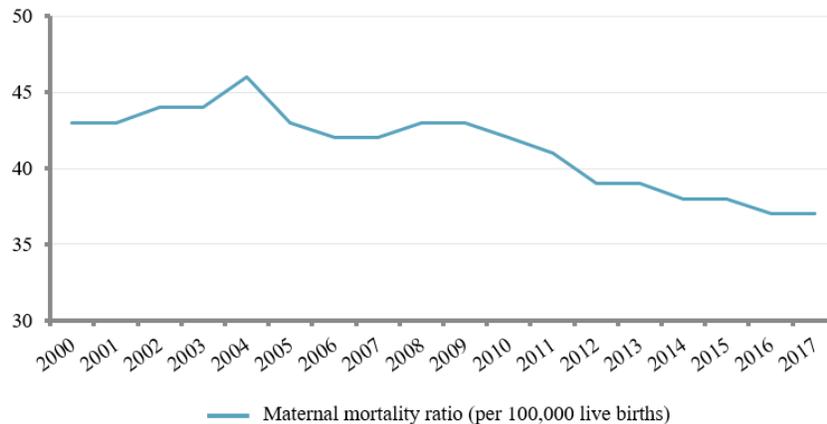
Source: World Health Organization Global Health Expenditure Database. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.OOPC.CH.ZS>.

The UHC scheme allows pregnant women free access to a continuum of care, including antenatal care (ANC), delivery, and postpartum care. The UHC benefits package covers almost all relevant sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, which has led to significant progress in SRH in the country. Since 2012, the utilization of prenatal care for pregnancies among Thai citizens is 100 percent and the use of skilled birth attendants is 99.7 percent (Tangcharoensathien, Chaturachindab, and Im-emc 2014). Even though Thai women receive public healthcare from hospitals more than men, the government health budget is expended more on men's healthcare, mainly for accidents (Chandoevvit 2019).

● Maternal Mortality Rate

Thailand has also seen a reduction in the maternal mortality ratio since 2004 (measured by the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births), from 43 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 37 per 1,000 live births in 2017, reflecting an improvement in maternal accessibility to health services and the success of women's health programs implemented in the country⁸ (Figure 2.2).

⁸ Maternal Mortality Ratio. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.MORT?locations=TH>.

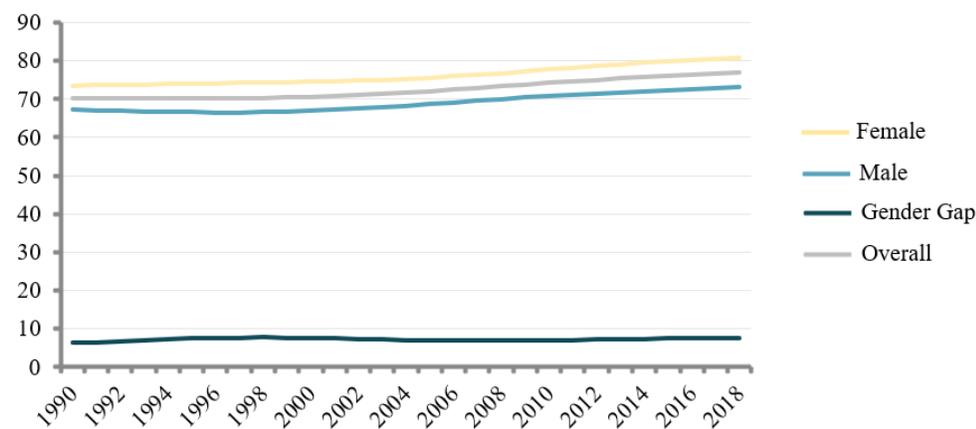
Figure 2.2 - Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births)

Source: Maternal Mortality Ratio. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.MORT?locations=TH>.

According to WHO (2019), the maternal mortality rate in low-income countries in 2017 is 462 per 100,000 live births and 11 per 100,000 live births in high-income countries. The global rate is 211 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. Thus, compared to other ASEAN countries, Thailand (37) has a higher rate than Singapore (9), Malaysia (25), and Brunei (31) but lower rates than Vietnam (43) and the Philippines (121).

● Life Expectancy

The life expectancy of Thai women has continued to increase over the last three decades. The overall age rose from 70 years in 1990 to 77 years in 2018. Life expectancy of females increased from 73 to 81 years, while life expectancy of males increased from 67 to 73 years. The gap between males and females increased from 6.3 to 7.5 years over 30 years⁹ (Figure 2.3). The average life expectancy in the world is 70.8 for males and 75.6 for females.¹⁰ Thailand ranks 59 out of 191 countries, compared to Malaysia (74), Brunei (79), Indonesia (121), and Vietnam (84).

Figure 2.3 - Life expectancy at birth (1990–2018)

Source: Life Expectancy at Birth. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=TH>.

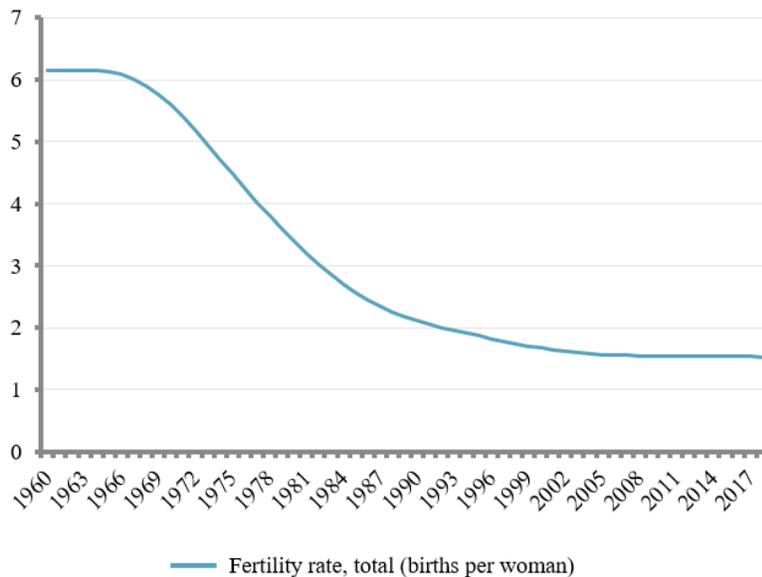
⁹ Life Expectancy at Birth. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=TH>.

¹⁰ United Nations Population Division Estimates. <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.

● Fertility Rate

The fertility rate in Thailand has been significantly decreasing over time from around 6 (births per woman) in 1960 to 1.5 in 2018¹¹ (Figure 2.4). In 2017, Thailand was among the countries with the lowest fertility rate in the world (Global Burden of Disease, 2018). The world average fertility rate in 2018 was 2.4 births per woman (UN 2019a). According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA2020¹²), the estimated total fertility rate for 2020 is 1.75 for Brunei, 2.53 for the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 2.43 for Malaysia, 1.54 for Thailand, and 1.77 for Vietnam.

Figure 2.4 - Fertility rate, total (births per women)



Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=TH>.

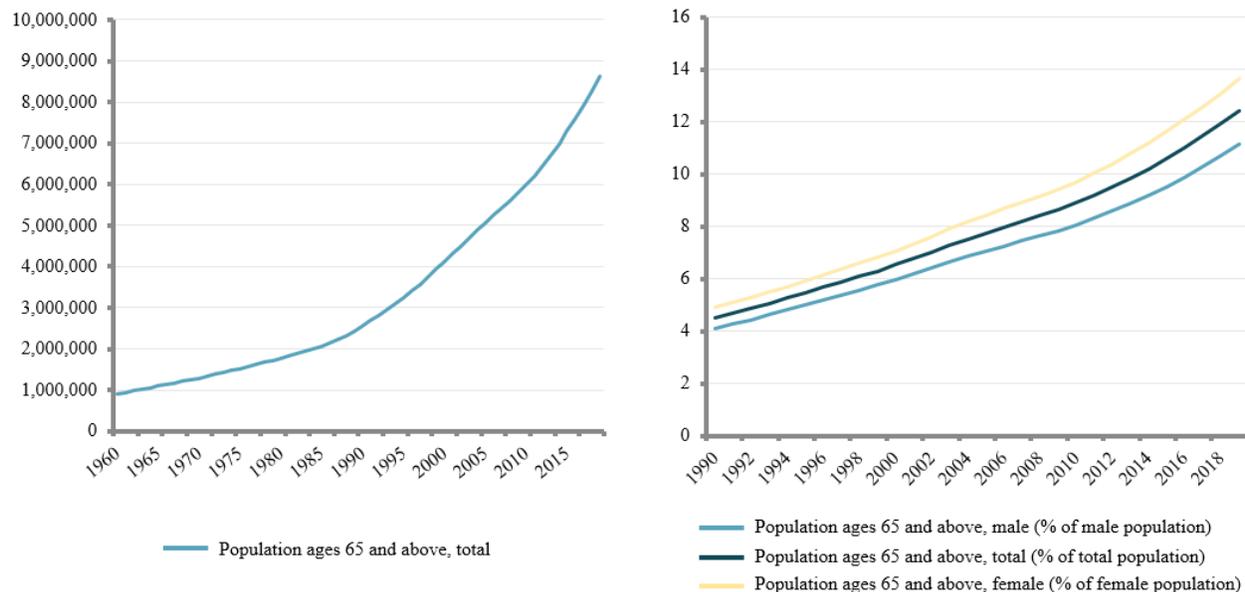
● Aging Society

Currently, Thailand is one of the developing countries in East Asia and Pacific with the highest share of elderly people. Thailand ranks second in the highest percentage of elderly people in ASEAN countries, after Singapore (UN 2015). The latest recorded numbers of the elderly (over 65 years) were 8,637,924 in 2019, with the number increasing almost 10 times over 60 years, from 908,124 in 1960, leading to a significant increase in the share of population ages 65 years or above for both males and females¹³ (Figure 2.5).

¹¹ Fertility Rate. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=TH>.

¹² <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/356.html>

¹³ Population Ages 65 and Above (classified by gender). <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.65UP.TO.ZS>.

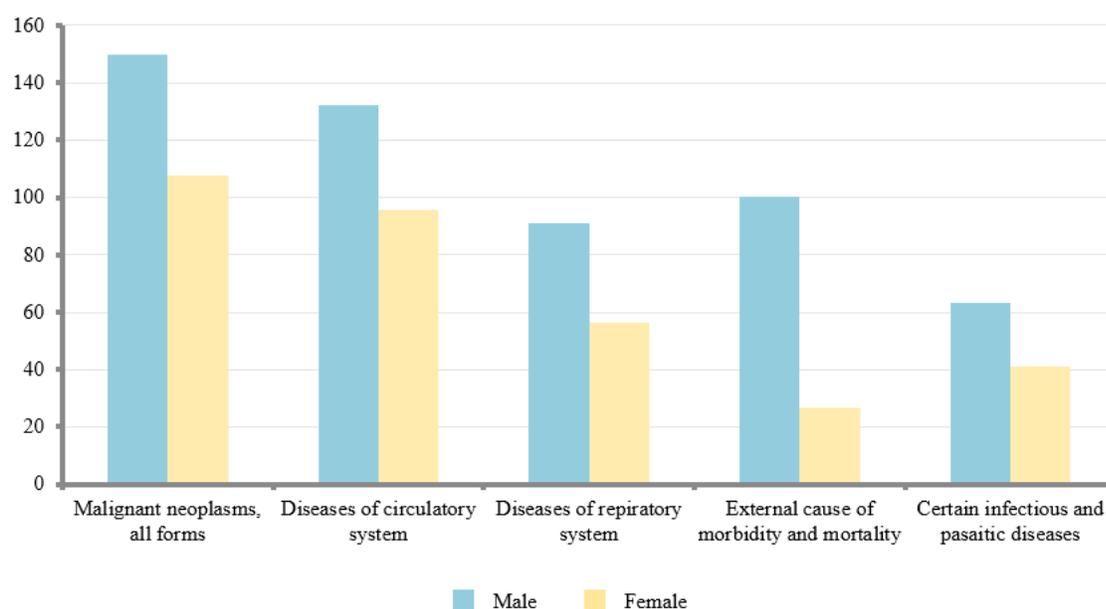
Figure 2.5 - Population ages 65 years and above (classified by gender)

Source: Population Ages 65 and Above (classified by gender). <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.65UP.TO.ZS>.

According to Pacific Prime Thailand (2019), an aging society is a cause for concern because additional resources are needed for elderly care, and elderly people are more likely to have chronic and critical diseases, which require high spending. It is expected that an aging society will cause the country's health care costs to rise to THB 1.4 trillion per year in the next 15 years (TDRI 2019). In addition, majority of caregivers for elderly in Thailand are unpaid, in which they provide the care under the norms of gratefulness (Tamdee et al. 2019). Studies found that elderly caregivers are most middle-aged women who are either the daughter or daughter-in-law, and the care is found to be a large burden for family caregivers (Elsa 2015; Tamdee et al. 2019).

● Cause of Death

Even though Thailand has shown significant progress in improving overall population health indicators, the mortality rate has increased from an average of 6.9 per 1,000 persons in 2015 to 7.5 in 2019 (based on the Public Health Statistics of the Ministry of Public Health 2019). The male mortality rate is higher than that for females: 8.7 percent compared to 6.4 percent for females. The Bureau of Registration Administration, Ministry of Interior, provides information on the causes of death under the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10), based on the Strategy and Planning Division, Ministry of Public Health. The main causes of death in 2019 included cancer, cerebrovascular disease, pneumonia, ischemic heart disease, and land transportation accidents (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6 - Number per 100,000 population for the first five leading cause groups of death in 2019

Source: Public Health Statistics 2019.

In addition, HIV/AIDS has been one of the main concerns in the country. Based on the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) data 2020, around 470,000 are living with HIV and 14,000 people died of AIDS in 2019.¹⁴ Young people are the key population at risk of acquiring HIV, and half of the new infections in Thailand occurred among those ages 15 to 24 years. The country had some of the highest HIV prevalences in Asia and the Pacific region. The rate of new infections through men-to-men sex has risen significantly during 1995–2015 and in 2018 around 13.5 percent of males who have sex with males living with HIV (Avert 2020). According to Kritsanavarin et al. (2020), HIV infection in Thailand is concentrated in some demographic groups, in which men having sex with men and transgender women are among the highest group.

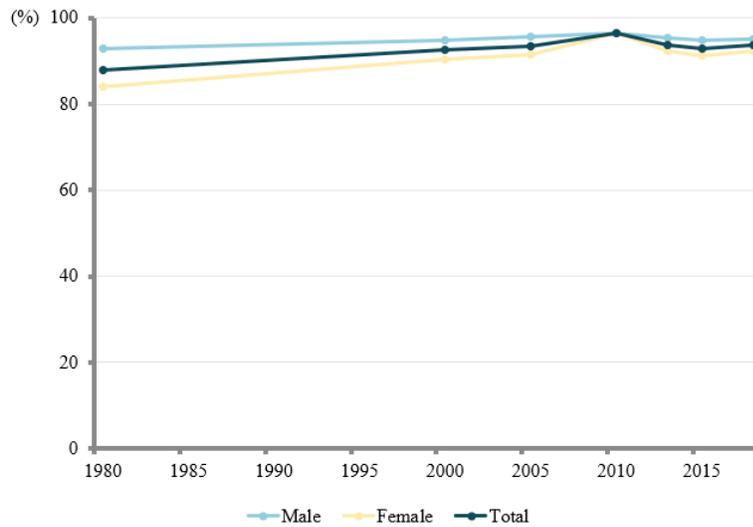
(2.2) Education

● Overall

Education has mainly been used as a force to improve human capital in Thailand. Each year, the Thai government invests around 4.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in education, approximately 20 percent of the total government budget (OECD/UNESCO 2016). The adult total (percentage of people ages 15 and above) literacy rate in Thailand is 93.7, the female literacy rate was 92.4 in 2018, while the rate for males was 95.2.¹⁵ During 2000–2018, there was a small gender gap of 3 percentage points in the adult literacy rate. However, the literacy rate for young females (ages 15–24) in 2018 is slightly higher than that for males (98.5 versus 97.6) (Figure 2.7).

¹⁴ Avert. HIV and AIDS in Thailand. <https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/asia-pacific/thailand>

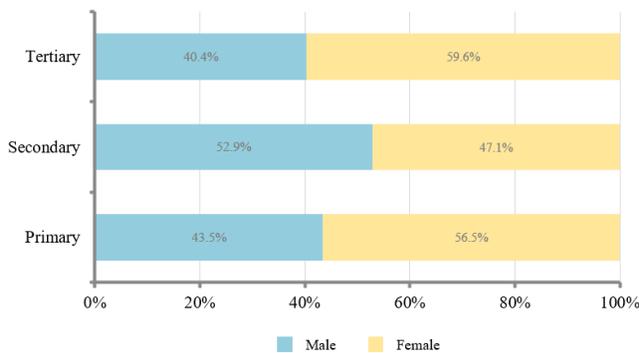
¹⁵ Literacy Rate in Thailand. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/th>.

Figure 2.7 - Literacy rate among the population ages 15 years and older

Source: Literacy Rate in Thailand. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/th..>

● Education Attainment

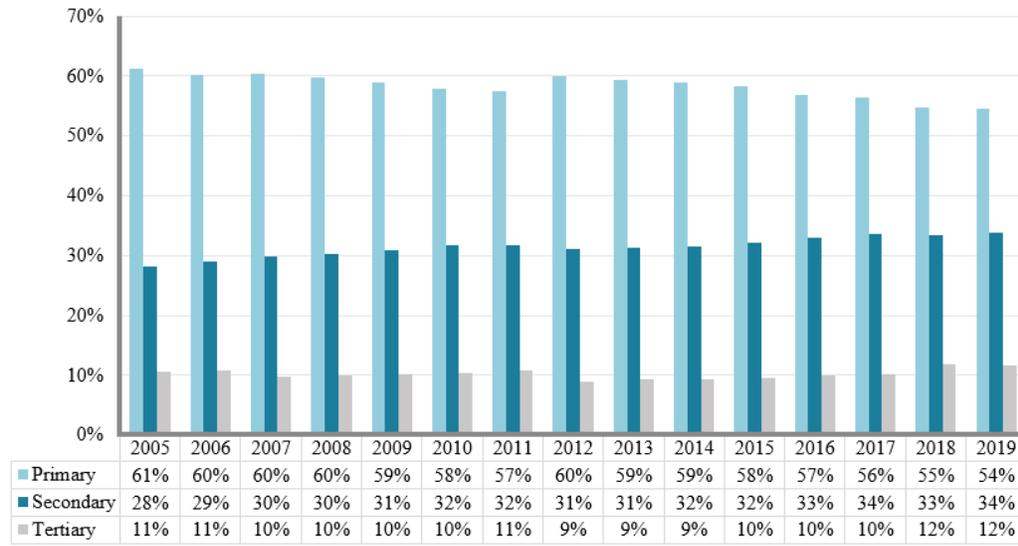
Educational attainment refers to the highest level of education that individual Thai workers have completed. This information has been directly drawn from the Labor Force Survey from 2005–2019, which shows the highest education level for the Thai population over 25 years. In 2019, Thai women accounted for around 60 percent of those who completed tertiary education, while males accounted for only 40 percent. However, males dominated at the secondary level with 53 percent and females dominated at the primary level, with 57 percent (Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8 - Proportion of males and females in each education level, 2019

Source: Labor Force Survey 2019.

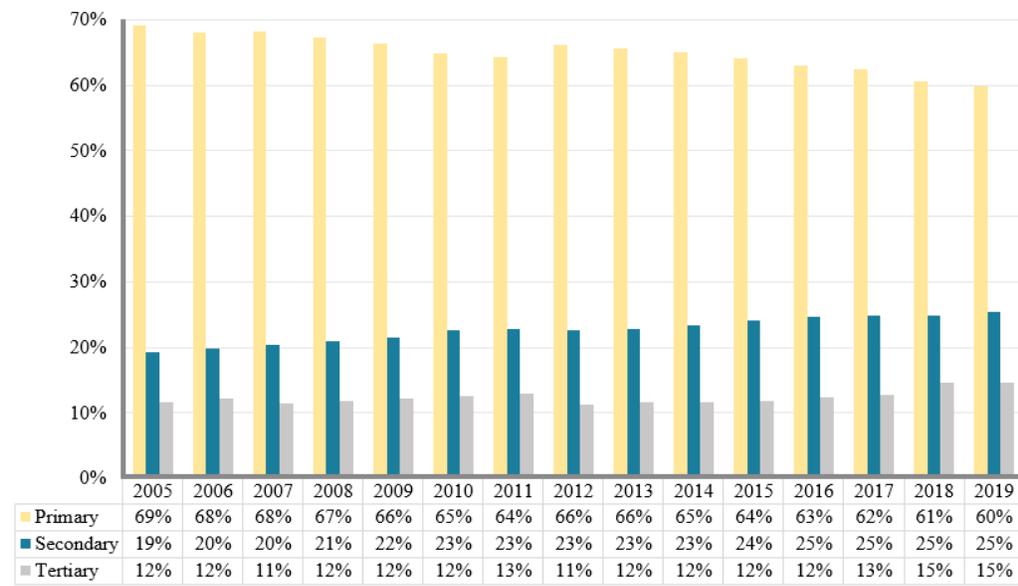
For males, the proportion at the primary level has decreased from 61 percent in 2005 to 54 percent in 2019. However, while the proportion at the secondary level increased from 28 percent in 2005 to 34 percent in 2019, the proportion at the tertiary levels has been stable (Figure 2.9). The trend for females is similar to that of males, but females showed a higher increase in the tertiary level, around 3 percentage points during that time, while males increased by just 1 percentage point (Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.9 - Educational attainment in each education level, population 25+ years, male (%)



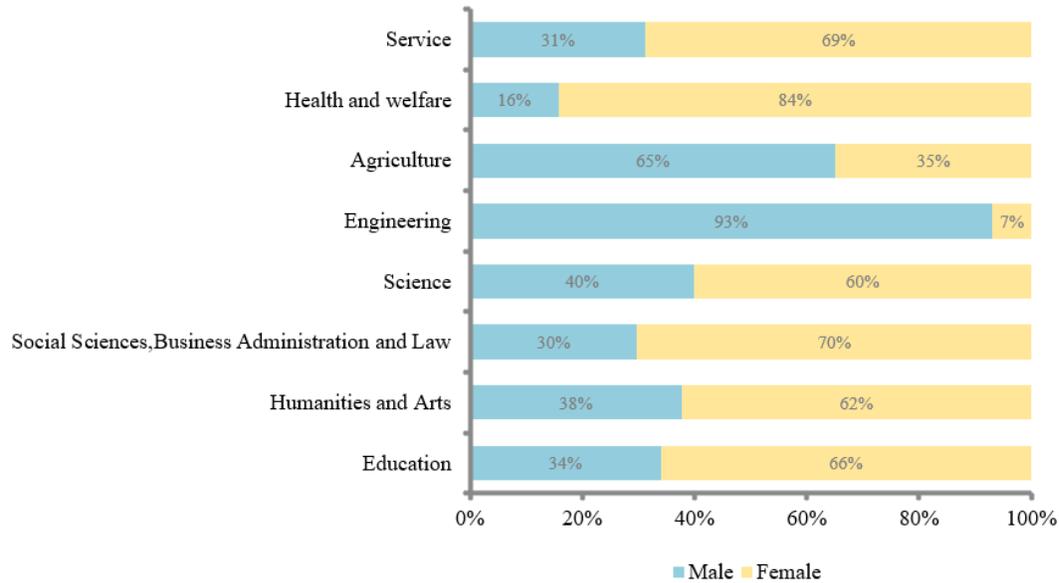
Source: Labor Force Survey 2019.

Figure 2.10 - Educational attainment in each education level, population 25+ years, female (%)



Source: Labor Force Survey 2019.

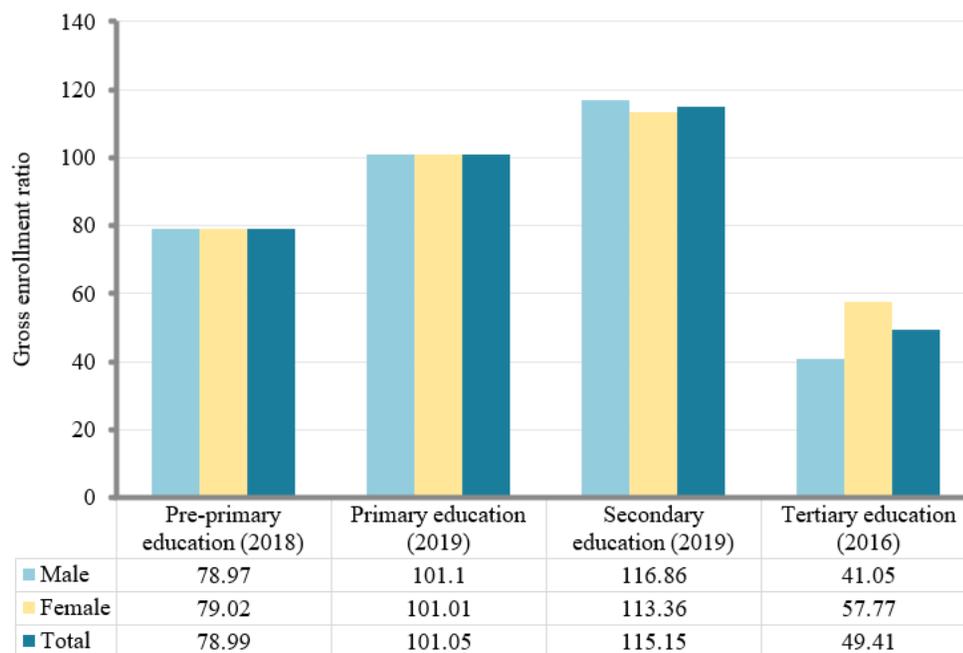
Males dominated in the field of agriculture (65 percent) and engineering (93 percent), while females were dominant in service (69 percent); health and welfare (84 percent); and business, humanities, and education (70 percent) sectors (by considering the field that men/women completed in tertiary education). Interestingly, females have a higher completion rate than men in science (60 percent versus 40 percent) (Figure 2.11). Note that this analysis was classified into eight fields according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) of the Office of Higher Education Commission.

Figure 2.11 - Distribution of gender in eight fields of study (%)

Source: LaborForce Survey 2019.

● Education Enrollment

Thailand has made significant progress in achieving gender equality in education, and women have higher access rates than men in the tertiary education level. In 2019, the gross enrollment ratio for primary and secondary education was over 100, where males had a slightly higher ratio than females, while the pre-primary enrollment ratio in 2018 and the tertiary enrollment ratio in 2016 was higher for females than males, especially in tertiary education, the female gross enrollment rate was 57.7, while the male rate was only 41.0 (Figure 2.12).

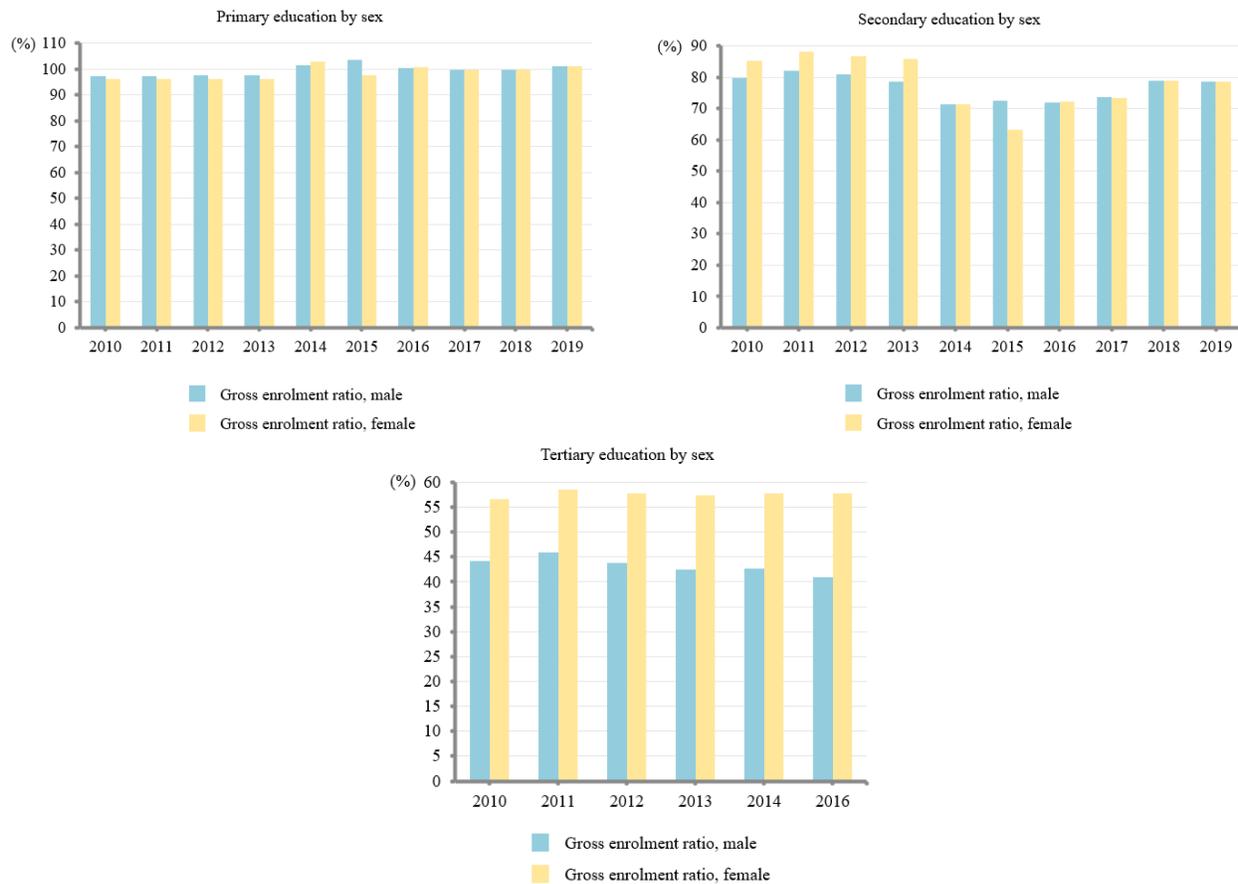
Figure 2.12 - Gross enrollment rates at all levels of education, 2019

Source: Gross Enrolment Rates in Thailand. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/th>.

Figure 2.13 presents the gross enrollment rates for each education level (classified by gender). Between 2010 and 2019, the gross enrollment ratio at the primary level increased for both males (from 97 percent to 101 percent) and females (from 96 percent to 101 percent). Thailand's rate was around the world average in 2019 but below neighboring countries such as Vietnam in 2019 (116 percent female, 114 percent male) and Malaysia in 2017 (male 104 percent, female 106 percent).

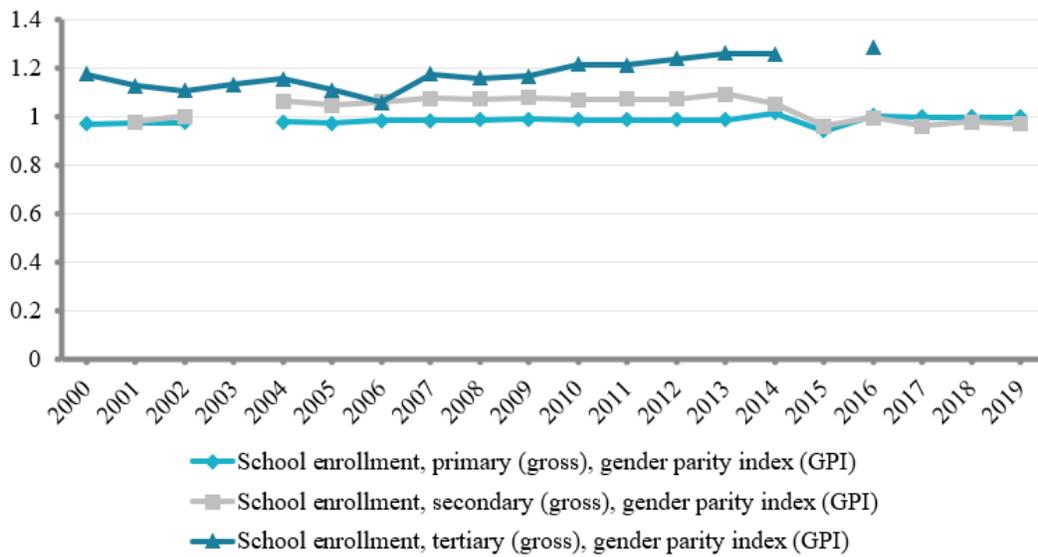
During 2010–2019, the gross enrollment ratio for secondary education also increased for both males and females. For females, the ratio increased from 85 percent to 113 percent, while for males, it rose from 79 percent to 116 percent. This rate is much higher than the world average, the East Asia and Pacific average, and Malaysia, as these countries/regions have a rate below 100 percent.

Finally, the gross enrollment ratio for tertiary education has remained at a similar level between 2010 and 2016. The ratio for females increased slightly from 56 percent in 2010 to 57 percent in 2016, while during the same time the ratio decreased from 44 percent to 41 percent for males. This rate is much higher than the world average (36 percent male, 41 percent female) and Malaysia's rate (37 percent male, 48 percent female).

Figure 2.13 - Gross enrollment rates (classified by gender), 2010–2019

Source: Gross enrolment rates in Thailand. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/th>.

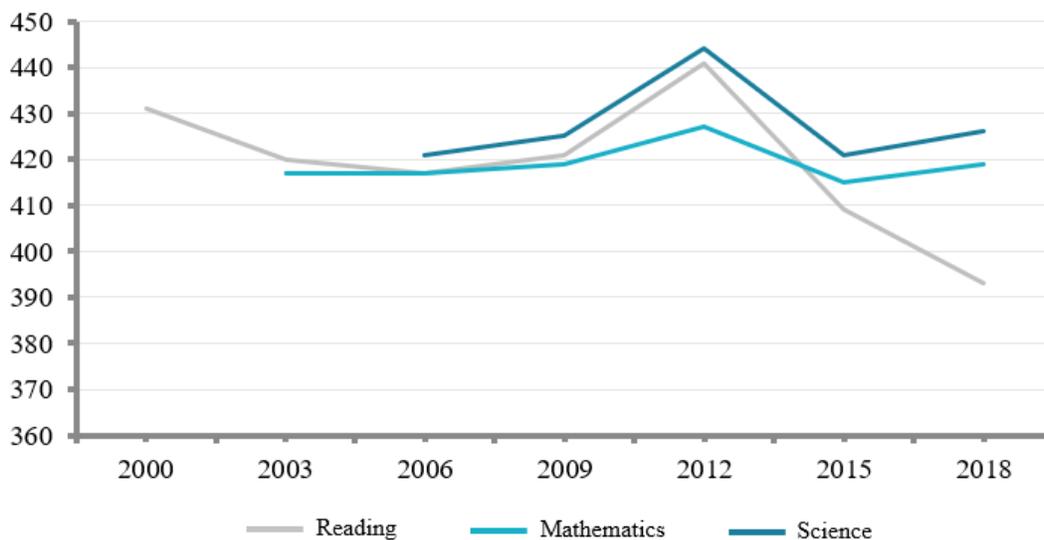
Thailand has made remarkable progress in terms of the female tertiary education enrollment rate as the Gender Parity Index (GPI) of tertiary level education increased from 1.18 in 2000 to 1.29 in 2016. This indicates that in tertiary education, Thailand's GPI strongly favors females (Figure 2.14). However, the GPI trend in secondary and primary education is relatively stable over 20 years and still slightly below 1, indicating that the country has been closer to achieving equality of access between males and females. When compared to other countries, the GPI in Thailand is lower than the average in these two levels, for example, in East Asia (0.998 primary level, 1.019 secondary level), Vietnam (primary 1.021), and Malaysia (secondary 1.078).

Figure 2.14 - Thailand's GPI, 2000–2019

Source: Gender Parity Index in Thailand. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/th>.

● Gender Differences in Learning Outcome

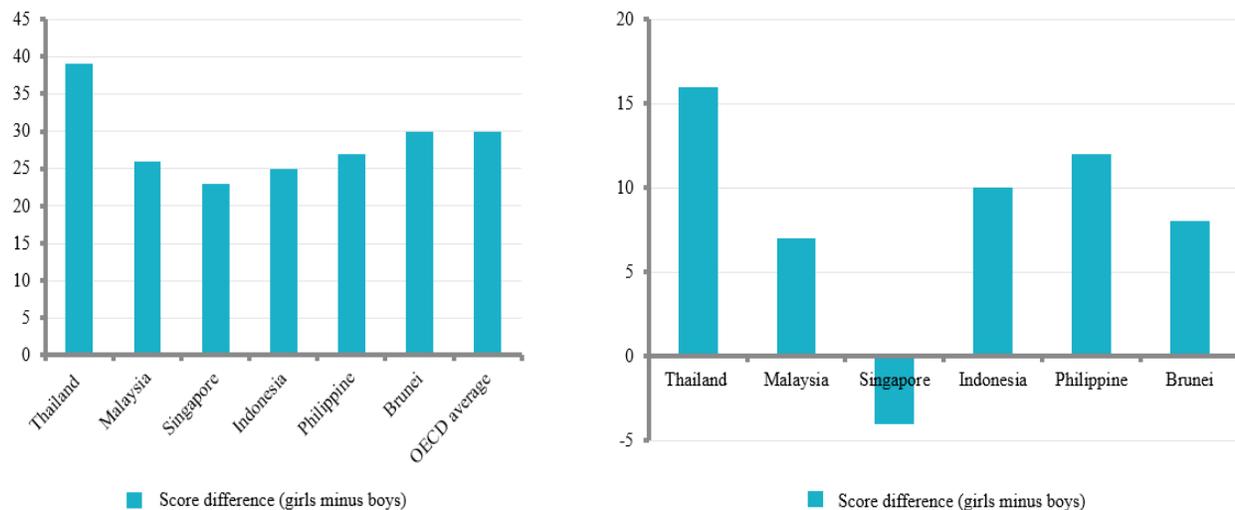
Thailand ranked 66 among 79 countries for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test in 2018, and students in Thailand scored lower than the OECD average in all parts, including reading 393 points (OECD 487), mathematics 419 points (OECD 489), and science 426 points (OECD 489) (OECD 2018). An analysis of trends from 2000–2018 showed that on average Thailand's reading points in PISA 2018 was lower than in prior assessments and 16 points lower than in PISA 2015. In mathematics and science, students' points was quite stable over time, with only the 2012 results performing better than average compared to other years (Figure 2.15).

Figure 2.15 - Thailand's PISA score trend, 2000–2018

Source: OECD 2019b.

The PISA 2018 Gender Study (OECD 2019b) found that girls in Thailand significantly outperformed boys in all parts, including reading (39 score points), mathematics (16 score points), and science (20 score points). Furthermore, the gender score gap was much higher than in neighboring countries as well as in the OECD countries (Figure 2.16). In addition, the Gender Study revealed a gender gap in the perception of future careers among high-performing Thai students in mathematics/science, with one out of five boys anticipating to work as an engineer or a science professional at 30 years, compared to only one out of seven girls. Three out of seven girls anticipated to work in health-related professions, while only one out of five boys expected to.

Figure 2.16 - Gender gap in reading and mathematics performance, 2018



Source: OECD 2019b.

The recent OECD PISA 2018 release shows the results of a global competence test (OECD 2020), which measured students' capacity to examine local, global, and cultural issues; their intercultural knowledge and skills; and their attitudes toward an engagement with other people and cultures (students from 66 countries/economies participated). The results revealed a large gender gap, where girls in Thailand performed better than boys, and showed that the largest differences in favor of girls are due to them having access to learning opportunities. Interestingly, Thai children are more concerned with social problems than students from many countries. Furthermore, they rank high in perceiving themselves as global citizens and being concerned about gender inequality issues.

● Schools and Gender Identity Formation

Girl's education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). According to OECD/UNESCO (2016), Thai girls outperformed boys in mathematics, and more than half of the students enrolled in science courses are female. The Ministry of Education committed to cooperate with international organizations to promote STEM education in 2017, especially focusing on females, which is a significant component in the Thailand 4.0 development strategy. Thailand will use a policy toolkit under UNESCO's global STEM and Advancement (SAGA) to analyze the impact of policies on gender disparities in STEM.

Gender stereotypes and norms in school. Gender values could be formed and reinforced at schools to create a foundation for gender inequality among children. According to NIDA (2019), Mechai Pattana School is an example of a school that prioritizes gender equality as a main objective, starting from girl's uniforms (skirt-pant hybrid), student cabinet (both girls and boys can lead and join committees), and curriculum (survival class that teaches critical teenage issues such as HIV/AIDs and sex education). Furthermore, based on constructive gender-based curricula and learning environments, girls and boys in this school have strong beliefs and high confidence in gender equality, through which they can achieve everything they want regardless of their sex. Finally, in 2018, the Ministry of Education implemented lessons from this school in 77 schools that were selected as a pilot group.

(3) Voice and Agency

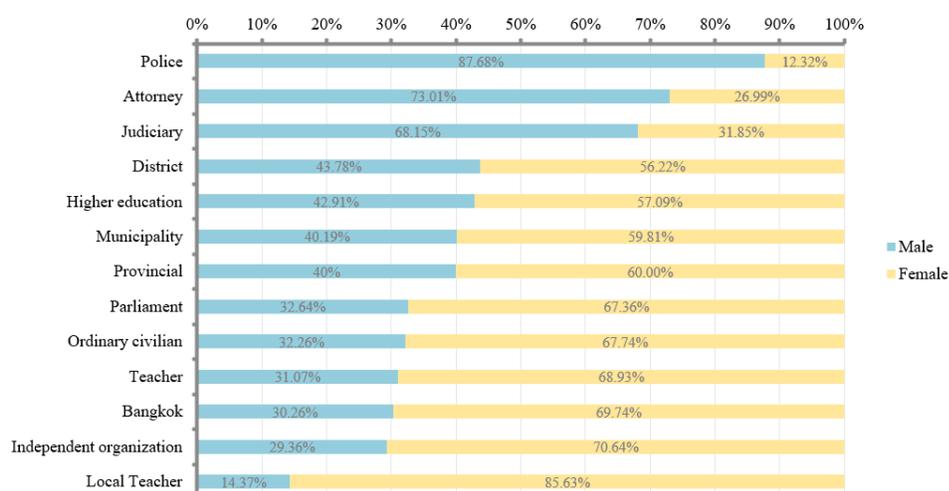
Key Findings:

- Thai women have a relatively high employment share in both public and private sectors, but the majority work in lower-level positions rather than in management or decision-making positions.
- Thai women are still underrepresented in terms of political participation particularly, there is a low number of women in parliament.
- Gender-based violence is still a problem across Thailand, especially domestic violence related to private or familial issues.

● Government Service

Even though Thai women represent a higher share of civil servants in government services compared to men, most of them work in lower-level positions rather than as managers and decision-makers. According to the Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC 2019), on average, women comprised 58.6 percent of Thailand's civil servants; however, women hold only 26.8 percent of management positions, and only 18.6 percent are high-ranking civil servants. In classification by occupation, a large share of women worked as local teachers, while the percentages of women serving as police, judges, and attorneys are only 12.3, 26.9, and 31.8, respectively (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 - Percentage of women in entire civil services in FY19 (classified by jobs)

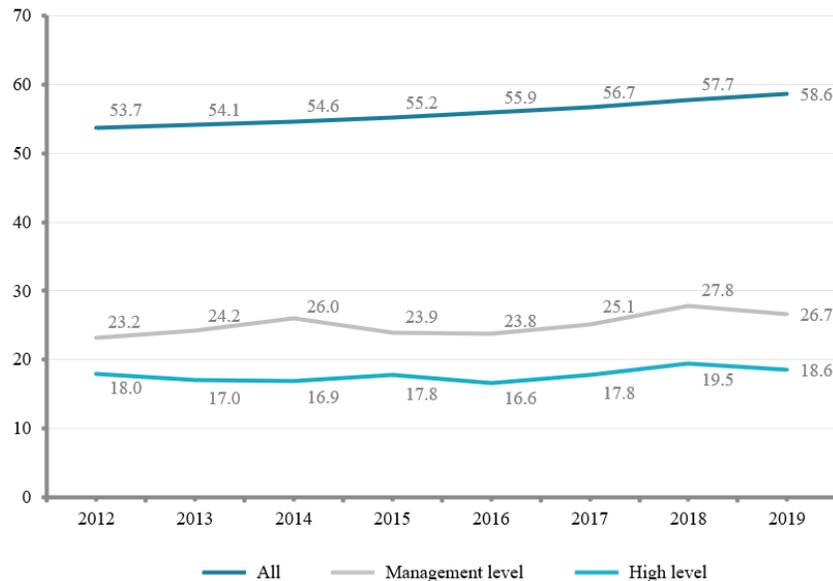


Source: OCSC 2019.

From 2012 to 2019, on average, Thai women held just 25.1 percent of management-level positions and only 17.8 percent of high-level positions. Even though the percentage of women in management level slightly increased from 23.2 percent in 2012 to 26.7 percent in 2019, the

percentage of those in high-level positions was stable at around 18 percent (Figure 3.2). It seems that the number of women decreases at every subsequent higher level in government service. While male civil servants at the upper and management levels outnumber women, fewer women were promoted or reached the management level.

Figure 3.2 - Percentage of women in whole civil services from 2012 to 2019 (classified by level)



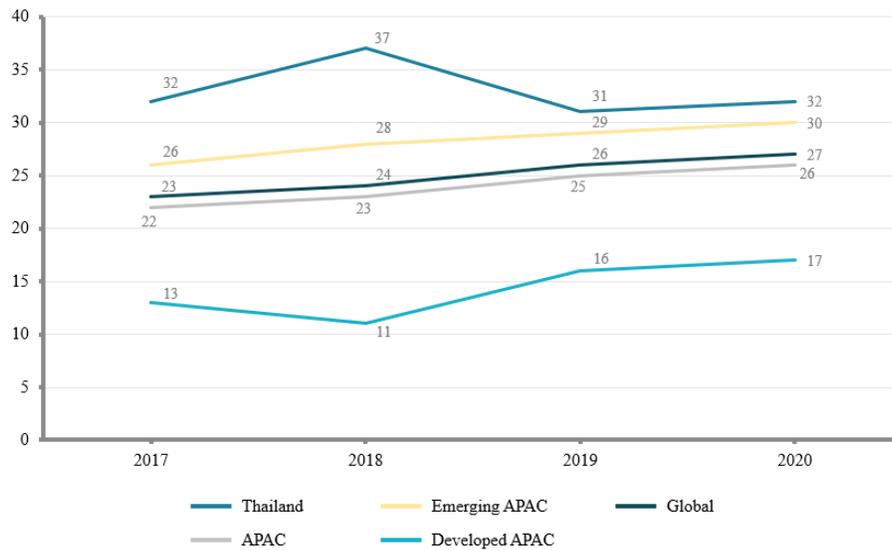
Source: OCSC 2012–2019.

Overall, Thailand has a relatively high share of women in civil service, but those women are more likely to have lower-level positions compared to the rest of the world. According to the Women Leader Index,¹⁶ Canada had the highest proportion of women in senior civil service in 2019–2020 (48.1 percent). The mean of the G-20 countries (and the EU commission) is 27.7 percent. The proportion of women in senior civil service in different countries in 2019–2020 are as follows: Australia (46.3 percent), the United Kingdom (44.7 percent), South Africa (41.4 percent), Brazil (39.4 percent), China (12.6 percent), Turkey (10.9 percent), the Republic of Korea (5.5 percent), Japan (4.9 percent), and Saudi Arabia (1.6 percent).

● Business Sector

Thai women hold 32 percent of senior leadership positions, which is higher than the global average of 27 percent and the Asia Pacific average of 26 percent (based on The Grant Thornton’s International Business Report 2020, which surveyed 5,000 mid-market companies in 32 economies) (Figure 3.3). Furthermore, women hold the highest positions in companies, (24 percent of chief executive officer (CEOs)/managing directors) as well as in senior leadership positions, (43 percent of chief financial officers).

¹⁶ <https://www.womenleadersindex.com/>.

Figure 3.3 - Percentage of senior management positions held by women (2017–2019)

Source: The Grant Thornton 2020.

However, despite the higher percentage of Thai women holding senior leadership positions (high level and management), the boards of directors in Thailand have been dominated by male directors. According to the report on Board Gender Diversity in ASEAN (2019) by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), in Thailand, women hold 20.4 percent of board seats in listed companies, which presents the most gender diversity in the board room compared to other ASEAN countries (Vietnam [15.4 percent] and Indonesia [14.9 percent]) (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 - Percentage of women in business leadership positions across ASEAN

	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	ASEAN average
Board membership	14.9	13.5	13.2	11.9	20.4	14.9
Board roles						
Board chair	11.7	6.1	3.9	5.2	7.6	7.1
Executive director	-	14	12.4	11.8	19.7	13.8
Non-executive director	-	10.4	14.7	11.1	19.7	14.3
Independent director	14.6	13.9	8.9	11.3	18.1	13.4
Audit committee	19.0	11.2	13.1	9.9	19.8	14.6
Other leadership roles						
Senior management	18.4	26.2	32.8	27.2	29.7	25.2

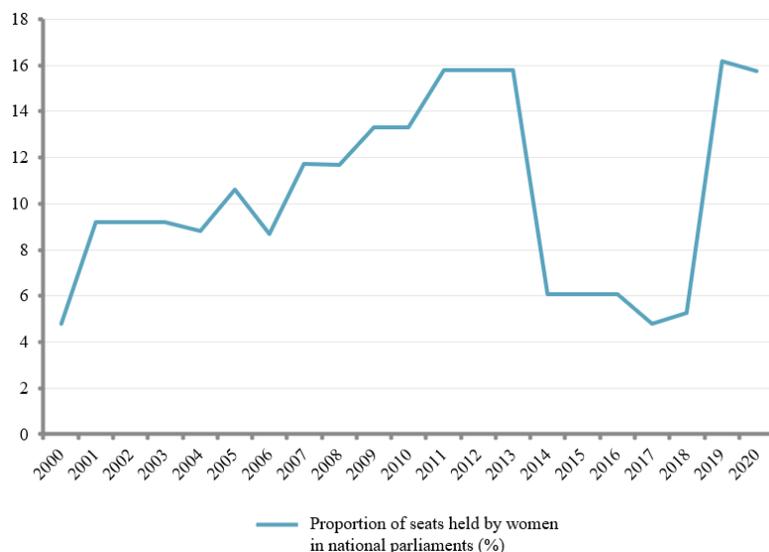
Source: IFC 2019.

The low female representation among boards of directors clearly indicates that Thai women are still under-represented in decision-making positions, even though Thai women have advanced in their level of education and have more active roles in the labor market. Previous studies analyzed the data of companies listed in the Thailand Stock Exchange (SET) and found the positive effects of gender-balanced corporate boards on firm performance (Chotiyaputta and Yoon 2018) and corporate governance (Paweenawat 2019a).

● Political Participation

Thai women are still underrepresented in terms of political participation despite some evidence (for example, Paweenawat 2018) that suggests that higher the share of women in national-level parliaments, lower the level of corruption in the country. Due to the uncertainty of the country's political situation, the proportion of seats held by women in parliament in Thailand has fluctuated over the last 20 years (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4 - Percentage of women in national parliaments in Thailand (2000–2020)



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 2020.

The ratio of Thai female representatives in parliament is low compared to other countries. Recent data on the number of women in parliament from the IPU (2020), which published the rankings of the percentage of women in national parliaments (as of October 1, 2020), indicated that in Thailand only 15.7 percent of lower house members (77 out of 489 Members of Parliament) and 10.4 percent of senators are female (only 26 out of 250 senators as of May 2019) (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 - Percentage of women in parliament (as of October 1, 2020)

Country/Region	Lower chamber and unicameral	Upper chamber	Average
Thailand	15.7	10.4	13.05
Malaysia	14.9	19.1	17.0
Philippines	28	29.2	28.6
Asia	20.6	17.4	20.2
South East Asia	20.6	13.2	19.3
Global	25.2	24.8	25.1

Source: Parline database on national parliaments (<https://data.ipu.org>).

Out of 35 ministers, only 3 ministers are female (accounting for 8.6 percent of the cabinet), while there is only one female governor in Nongbualampu Province, which is 1 out of 77 provinces (1.3 percent of Thailand’s governors) (based on the Grant Thornton’s International Business Report 2020). According to discussions hosted by the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Thailand,¹⁷ societal attitudes toward women and traditional gender roles are obstacles for women in politics. Other barriers include public perceptions of women in political positions, the lack of funding for women-led campaigns, and the political party system.

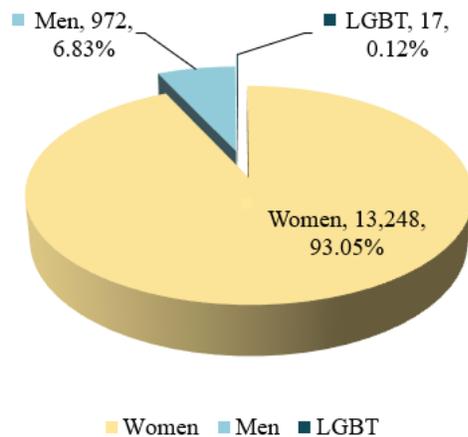
Due to the low number of women holding political positions, there has been an attempt to enforce a gender quota system in political participation during the drafting process of the 2017 Constitution, when a gender quota system was discussed (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development 2020). Finally, Article 90 of the Constitution of 2017 relating to public participation and decision-making dictates that political parties need to consider gender equality when preparing the list of candidates for election. However, this attempt was not materialized as political parties interpreted “need to consider gender equality when preparing the list of candidates” as not mandatory and continued to propose male candidates.

● Gender-based violence

The Thai government passed the Domestic Violence Act, Victim Protection Act, B.E. 2550 in 2007, which was aimed at fighting against gender-based violence. However, gender-based violence is still a problem across Thailand, especially domestic violence (Chuemchit et al. 2018). Furthermore, over 16 percent of Thai women who are married or cohabitating have experienced domestic violence, including psychological, physical, and/or sexual violence. More severely, most of the incidents are unreported due to embarrassment and shame or not knowing where to seek help.

Psychological and physical violence were more severe than sexual violence in Thailand (based on a study conducted by the Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Research Subjects at Chulalongkorn University in 2017). In 2017, the Royal Thai Police reported 2,535 rape cases, compared to 3,240 cases in 2015 and 2,109 cases in 2016. On average, the number of domestic violence victims in 2018 was 39 people per day (or a total of 14,237, comprising 13,248 female victims, 972 male victims, and 17 LGBT victims) (Figure 3.5).

¹⁷ <https://www.fccthai.com/events/thailand-women-in-politics-a-panel-discussion/>.

Figure 3.5 - Number of domestic violence victims in 2018

Source: Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development 2019.

However, The Thailand Development Research Institute has estimated that approximately 30,000 rape cases in the country each year (TDRI, 2014). This number contradicts to the number of cases reported to police gathered from a survey of criminal offences against the Thai population in 2012, indicating that the average number of cases was around 4,000 per year. It means that approximately 90% of rape cases remain unreported to the police in the country (UN, 2017).

According to the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (2020), due to the economic difficulty for Thai people during the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of domestic abuse and violence against women has increased significantly. A survey conducted by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation found that since March 2020 (start of COVID-19), reported cases rose by 66 percent across the country. This rise in cases was because of the increase in alcoholism and the lower household income in Thailand caused by the pandemic.

Regarding gender-based violence in the workplace, to prevent and address the issues of workplace sexual harassment, the Cabinet implemented measures on June 16, 2015, which require government agencies to develop internal complaint procedures and pay more attention to these issues (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development 2020). The outcome has to be reported to the Committee for PGE every year. In addition, the Ministry of Labor is also being assigned by the Cabinet to promote and apply those measures in the private sector.

(4) Emerging Areas of Concern

Key Findings:

- Adolescent pregnancy (ages 10–19 years) has remained a chronic and unsolved issue as the country has continuously had higher rates than the world standard.
- Generation Y tends to prioritize their career progression, stay single, delay marriage, and have fewer children compared to prior generations.
- Thai people have favorable attitudes toward LGBT people, but this positive attitude drops when they are family members.

● Adolescent Pregnancy

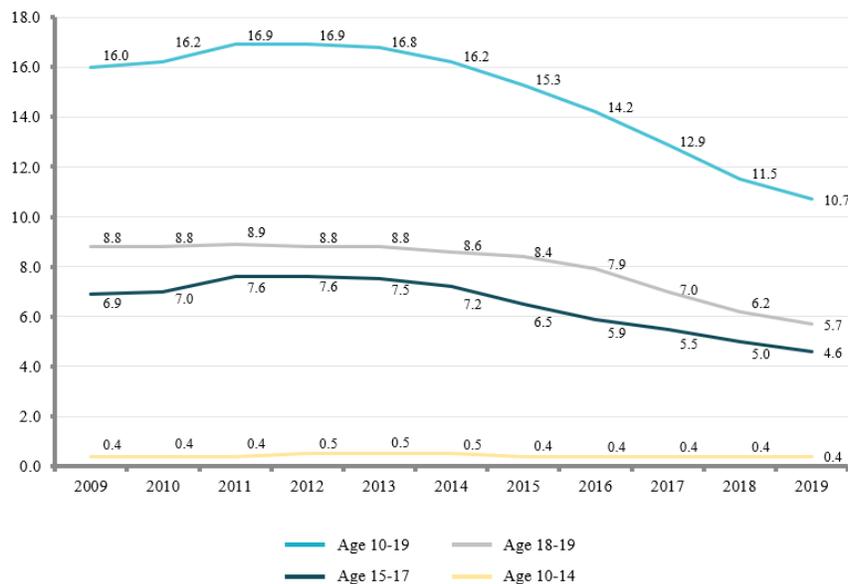
While the fertility rate in Thailand has been decreasing over time, adolescent pregnancy (ages 10–19 years) has remained a chronic and unsolved issue in the country. The recent public health statistics in 2019 (Ministry of Public Health 2019) revealed that out of 596,736 women who gave birth in 2019, 63,831 were adolescent pregnancies (ages 10–19 years), which could be divided into (a) younger-aged girls 10–14 years (2,180) and (b) older girls ages 15–19 years (61,651).

On average, the number of births was 169 in the 15–19-year age group and 6 in the below 15 age group, which has shown a decreasing pattern from 2011 (Table 4.1). This reduction led to a decrease in the share of adolescent pregnancies among the total number of women giving birth in Thailand. The share has gradually reduced over 10 years from 16 percent in 2009 to 10.7 percent in 2019 (Figure 4.1). However, even though there seems to be a decreasing trend, Thailand still has a higher rate than the world standard (over 10 percent).

Table 4.1 - Number of adolescent mothers in Thailand per day (2011–2019)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Age 15-19	353	352	334	308	278	252	225	192	169
Age 10-14	9	10	9	9	8	8	7	7	6

Source: Ministry of Public Health 2019.

Figure 4.1 - Share of adolescent pregnancy in Thailand (2009–2019)

Source: Ministry of Public Health 2019.

Furthermore, most adolescent pregnant women had lower secondary (60.7 percent), upper secondary (13.3 percent), and primary (17.2 percent) education (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security 2018, Ministry of Public Health 2020). Most of them, around 46 percent, had no income and if they did, it was lower than THB 5,000 per month. Furthermore, they said that they were not ready to take care of the children due to their lack of occupation, insufficient income, family economic problems, and lack of parenting knowledge.

One main issue related to adolescent pregnancy is the health of the newborn. The majority of newborn babies (33.7 percent) who are underweight are born to adolescent mothers (Ministry of Public Health 2020). Furthermore, most adolescent mothers (almost 50 percent) report that they are out of school to take care of their children, while only 24 percent are back to study in the same school and 4 percent move to a new school. In addition, 17 percent study in non-formal education and 6 percent report working. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)¹⁸ (2015) has suggested that the key factors contributing to adolescent pregnancy include lack of knowledge relating to sex, reproductive health, and contraceptive methods. Stigma is the greatest barrier to access information and assistance.

The Prevention and Solution of the Adolescent Pregnancy Problem Act B.E. 2559 (2016)¹⁹ was enacted to complement the National Strategy for Prevention and Solution of the Adolescent Problem (2017–2026), targeting a reduction of the rate of live births to 0.5 for every 1,000 population for girls between 10 and 14 years and to 25 per 1,000 population for girls and women between 15 and 19 years by 2026 (Department of Women’s Affairs and Family

¹⁹ The Prevention and Solution of the Adolescent Pregnancy Problem Act, 2016. [http://rh.anamai.moph.go.th/download/all_file/index/Teen%20Pregnancy%20Act%20Certified%20Version%20\(1\).pdf](http://rh.anamai.moph.go.th/download/all_file/index/Teen%20Pregnancy%20Act%20Certified%20Version%20(1).pdf).

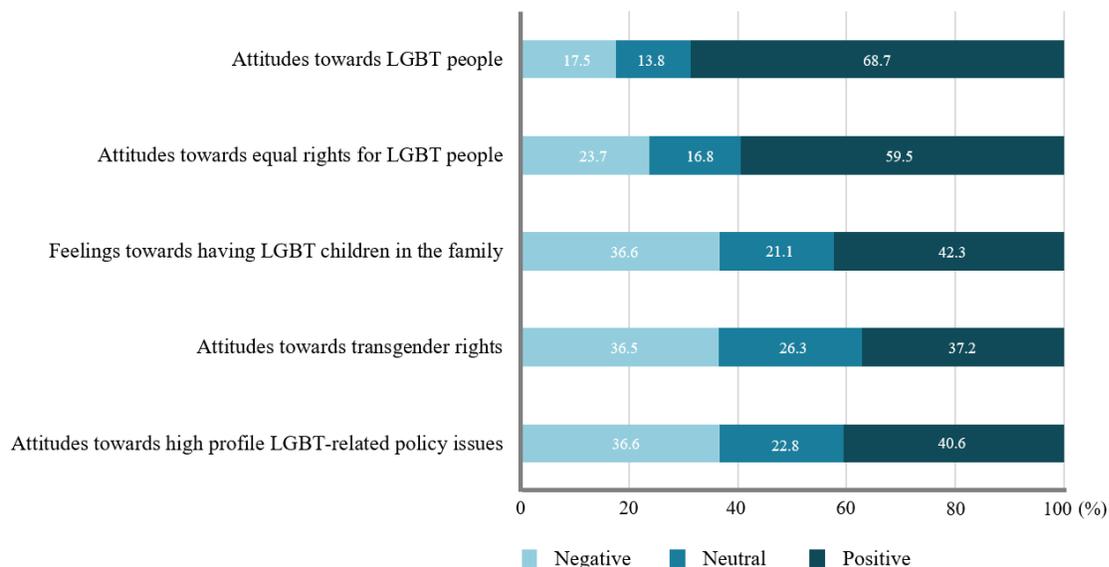
Development 2020). This act guarantees adolescents’ right to decision-making based on sufficient information and increased knowledge of and access to reproductive health services.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education enacted a ministerial regulation requiring educational institutions at all levels to include age-appropriate sex education as part of the curriculum, constrain the discharge of pregnant students, and ensure continuous facilitation of appropriate services to pregnant students. Recently, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation has the ‘Model Teenage Mums’ program aiming to decrease the constraints faced by young mothers and their families in term of insufficient incomes, educational access, and domestic violence (The Nation, 2020). The program has planned to introduce the selected teenage mums to local communities and allow them to help their peers.

● Discrimination against LGBTI

Generally, non-LGBT people have favorable attitudes toward LGBT people and most people support equal rights and equal access to services for LGBT people (based on the Being LGBT in Thailand Survey of UNDP 2018). However, the positive attitude drops in the case that LGBT people are their family members, colleagues, , and community members. Around 69 percent of the respondents have a positive attitude toward LGBT people but only 42.3 percent toward LGBT children in family. (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 - Social attitudes toward LGBT of Thai people



Source: UNDP 2019b.

Among LGBT, transgender women and bisexual men faced the highest levels of discrimination in the country (UNDP 2019b). Around 53 percent of LGBT respondents reported verbal harassment, while 16 percent reported sexual assault. Furthermore, 10 percent of LGBT people and 32 percent of transgender women had experienced discrimination in the workplace. The World Bank (2018a) survey on the ‘Economic Inclusion of LGBTI Groups in Thailand’ also revealed that despite the country’s significant progress in improving LGBTI status in society, discrimination against LGBTI is present when they “look for a job, access education and health

care services, buy or rent properties, and seek legal protection.” Furthermore, the majority of respondents in both groups (LGBTI: 51 percent and non-LGBTI: 69 percent) do not know that laws exist forbidding anti-LGBTI discrimination.

Thailand ranked 60 out of 174 countries in the LGBT Global Acceptance Index (GAI) of the Williams Institute ranking in 2017 (Flores 2019). The 2012 National Social Welfare Promotion Commission Regulation acknowledged transgender people as social welfare recipients (UNDP and MSDHS 2018). However, there is no legal right for LGBTI to alter their gender identity in official documents, except in the case of intersex people with medical certification (UNDP and USAID 2014). In 2015, the Gender Equality Act was the first legislation in the country that outlawed discrimination against LGBTI and ensured their equal rights. The 2017 Constitution has included terms (for example, [“personal status,” “underprivileged persons,” “all people shall enjoy equality”) that can be used to include LGBTI people.

The cabinet has recently endorsed the Civil Partnership Bill, which provides same-sex couples with the same legal rights as other married couples. The Civil Partnership Bill aims “to enable same-sex couples to be able to register as a civil partnership and to be entitled to a set of rights and responsibilities that are afforded to opposite-sex spouses” (Paichaiyapoom, 2021). Furthermore, the bill supported LGBTI people’s right to form a family in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the 4th National Human Right Plan (2019–2022).

● Gender and Conflict in Southernmost Thailand

In the ongoing conflict in southernmost Thailand, most of the death cases are men; however, more than 3,000 widows and over 7,000 orphans in the conflict-affected area suffer severe stress (Deep South Watch 2018; Isranews 2020). When a family member is charged, arrested, or on the run, in most cases, the woman takes charge of the household, monitors judicial proceedings, and assumes primary responsibility for providing for the family. Women whose husbands are fighting court cases report assuming significant debt to pay for bail, legal procedures, and visits. For the relatively small number of female returnees, no gender-sensitive nor gender-specific reintegration processes are in place. Women who return with their husbands, or whose husbands return, report stress and domestic tension, particularly as the recently returned men rarely leave the house. In many of these cases, the women continue to be the primary income earner.

While women suffer these sudden increased burdens, their enhanced income-generating role has positive consequences beyond subsistence: women report paid work enhances family equilibrium, increases their voice in family decision-making, and conveys greater financial autonomy. However, they confront physical and mental health concerns of their own from the intense stress and burden of working and caring for their children, as well as from their returning husbands. These health impacts of parents were also reported to affect young children (World Bank 2020c).

● Gender and Environment

- *Gender and Climate Change*

Climate change has been one of the most challenging issues to address in the 21st century. Southeast Asia was named as a regional ‘hotspot’ for climate change. There has been an increasing frequency and intensity of global warming and climate-related events such as increased flooding, drought, rising of sea level, and shifting seasons. “An increasing body of research has shown that climate-related disasters have impacted human populations in many areas including agricultural production, food security, water management and public health. The level of impacts and coping strategies of populations depends heavily on their socio-economic status, socio-cultural norms, access to resources, poverty as well as gender. Research has also provided more evidence that the effects are not gender neutral, as women and children are among the highest risk groups. Key factors that account for the differences between women’s and men’s vulnerability to climate change risks include: gender-based differences in time use; access to assets and credit, treatment by formal institutions, which can constrain women’s opportunities, limited access to policy discussions and decision making, and a lack of sex-disaggregated data for policy change.” (World Bank, 2021a, p.23).

The Thai government has ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol to commit to a reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions. Since 1962—2014, there were total of 16 natural disasters in Thailand. In the 2004 tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean (including Thailand) and the flood disaster in Thailand of 2011, the majority of the victims were women. The government has worked with development partners in developing gender-responsive disaster management and has provided training for government officials and civil society organizations and community leaders. There is a need to include gender aspects in climate-related prevention, mitigation, and adaptation policies and programs especially for women-headed households, the elderly, and disabled women living in disaster-prone areas.

- *Gender and Marine Plastic*

Several studies find that Southern, Eastern, and Southeast Asia are the top three regions that produce mismanaged plastic waste. Most of the ASEAN countries, including Thailand, the Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Lao PDR, have generated marine plastics pollution. In 2019, the ASEAN countries collaborated to manage plastic waste by signing an agreement on ‘the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN Region’ and establishing the ‘ASEAN Marine Plastics Framework of Action’. This action framework aimed to “promote cooperation for the protection, restoration, and sustainable use of coastal and marine environment, respond to and deal with the risk of pollution and threats to marine ecosystems and coastal environment, in particular in respect of ecologically sensitive areas.”

The World Bank Group has supported Thailand’s development of an action plan on marine plastic management and gender guidelines to promote equality and empower women engaging in marine plastic management, to achieve SDG 5 on Gender Equality and SDG 14 on Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas, and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development. Recent evidence indicates that there is an association between gender and usage of plastic and its effect on the environment and population’s health. For example, women are more likely to buy plastic consumer goods and deal with waste disposal because of their role as the main family caregivers. Thus, women are important stakeholders in reducing plastics and handling waste disposal. Furthermore, the low quality of waste management systems, particularly in the

informal sector, could increase health risks among workers. The increase of diseases could lead to an increasing number of women as family caretakers for sick children and family members, causing loss of their income. Thus, the country needs laws and policies to incorporate gender-sensitive and responsive measures to tackle plastic production, waste management, and related health and safety issues.

(5) Economic Opportunities

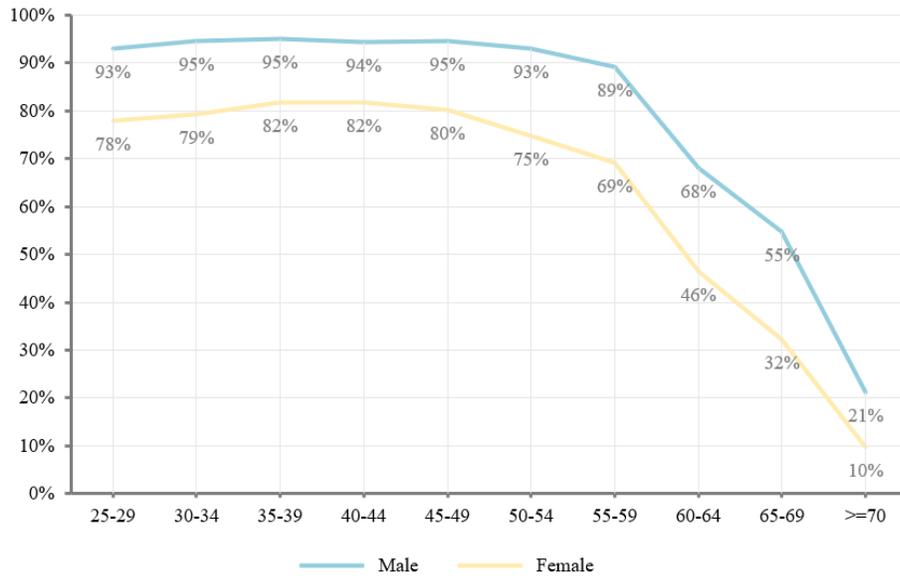
Key Findings:

- While there is an existing gender gap in labor force participation in Thailand, the gap is still much lower than the average global gender gap due to the country's high female participation rate.
- Thailand's structural economic transformation and education improvement shifted Thai women from unpaid jobs in the informal sector to paid jobs in the formal sector.
- The country has been highly successful in reducing the overall gender wage gap, but there still exists a gender wage gap in informal employment and a large motherhood wage penalty.
- No gender differences in ICT access exists among the prime working-age group, but a large gap exists among the old age group. Women are highly involved in e-commerce activities.
- The majority of Thai women and older workers are in informal sectors, low-paid occupations, and poor-quality jobs.
- Young workers and married women with young children have been most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

(5.1) Gender and Employment

Thailand's labor force participation rate (LFPR) decreases with age, and male LFPR is higher than female LFPR in all age groups. In 2019, the highest LFPR was in the prime working age group (25–54 years), with male and female rates 93–95 percent and 75–82 percent, respectively (Figure 5.1). The LFPR declined dramatically after the age of 55, which is the eligible age to claim their old-age pension in Thailand (Paweenawat et al. 2019). However, compared to other countries, this age seems to be relatively low, for example, the eligibility age for OECD countries is 60–65 years; the lowest one is 57 years (Gruber and Wise 1999).

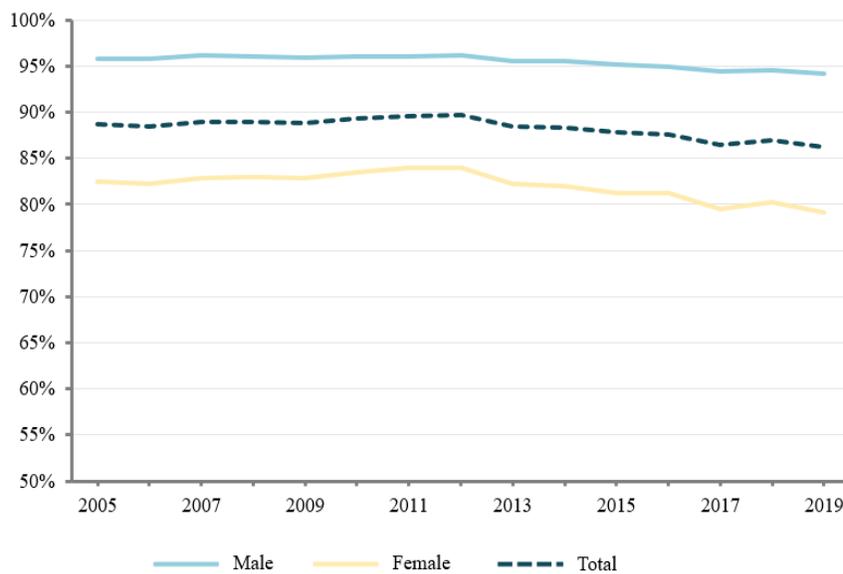
Figure 5.1 - Thailand's LFPR, 2019



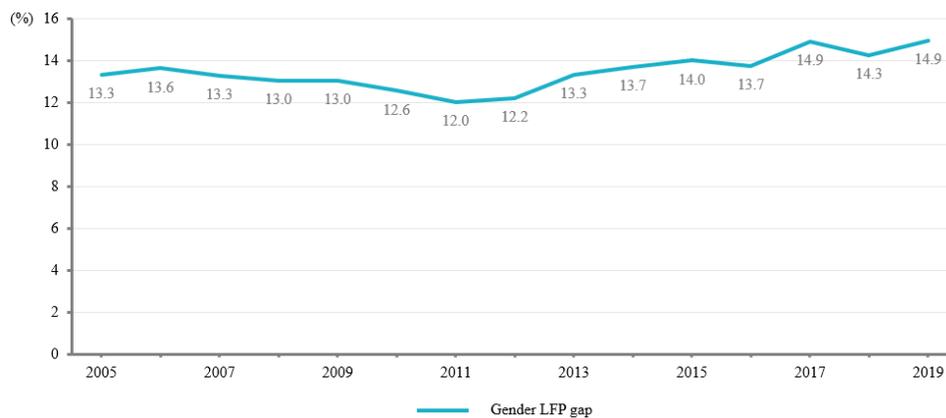
Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2019.

Focusing on the group with the highest participation rate in the labor market between 2005 and 2019, the male LFPR trend in the prime working age is quite stable at 94–96 percent; for females, it slightly decreased from 83 percent to 79 percent (Figure 5.2). This reveals a relatively stable gender gap in participation rate over time, around 13–15 percentage points per year (Figure 5.2). Based on the ILO database (ILOSTAT 2020), from 1978 to 2019, the LFPR of males was always higher than that of females. Previous studies (for example, Paweenawat and McNown 2018; Schultz 1990) have suggested that men have higher LFPR than women because women's LFPR in Thailand is affected by their role in the household, marriage, fertility, and education.

Figure 5.2 - LFPR of prime working age (2005–2019)



Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

Figure 5.3 - Gender gap in LFPR of prime working age (2005–2019)

Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

Even though a gender gap in LFPR exists in Thailand, this gap is still quite low compared to the average gender gap in LFPR globally, which currently stands at 26 percentage points. In Thailand the male and female LFPRs were 75 percent and 54 percent, respectively (ILO 2019). The main reason explaining the low gender gap in LFPR is that Thailand has historically recorded relatively high female LFPRs, and the country has been recognized as having high female LFPR compared to other Southeast Asia countries, for example, Malaysia (46 percent) and the Philippines (48 percent) (World Bank 2018b). The changes in women's labor force participation over time are affected by components including the economic state of the household, the education that has an effect on the structural change, occupational segregation that increases the share of commerce, and service employment that favors women in labor market (Borrowman and Klasen 2019). With the increase of education attendance of female youth, especially an increase of female enrollment rate in tertiary level, more female continues study instead of being in labor force. Moreover, the limitation of institutional factors, including laws related to protection for jobs of parents and paid parental leave, as well as inadequate childcare facilities in the country, especially the early childhood care and education (ECCE) services for children under age 3, draw difficulties for women to participate in labor market. These are the main reasons for the decline of female labor force participation rate since 2012.

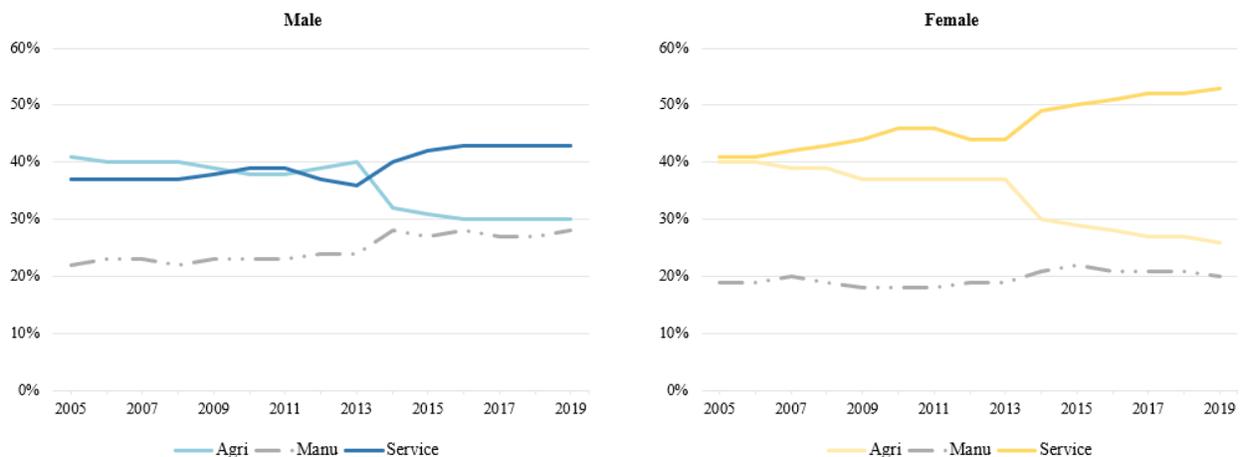
In the case of Thailand, the country's economic growth with industrialization, improvement in girls' education, and encouragement of women to join the labor market leads to high female LFPR (Paweenawat and McNown 2018). Furthermore, Thai women continue working after getting married and having children (Wacharaporn 2008). In Thailand, married women's participation rate in the labor market is around 80 percent (Liao and Paweenawat 2018), which is quite high compared to other countries. The main reason for the high participation rate is not only because Thai women are expected to be the primary care providers and household chore performers but also because they are expected to be the main earners in the family (Paweenawat 2020a).

Thai women's labor market participation has been growing along with the gradual transformation of Thailand's economy since 1985 (Paweenawat and McNown 2018). While the country's economy transformed from agriculture to manufacturing and service during the last few decades, it caused a high demand in the workforce, and women became the main source of labor

supply. During that time, the labor force shifted from a low-paying agricultural sector to higher-paying manufacturing and service sectors, accompanied by an increase in real income for Thai people (Ikemoto and Uehara 2000; Vanitcharearnthum 2019). Since 2000, while the employment share of the manufacturing and trade sectors gradually declined, the employment share of the service sector, such as finance and real estate, has been growing (Paweenawat et al. 2019).

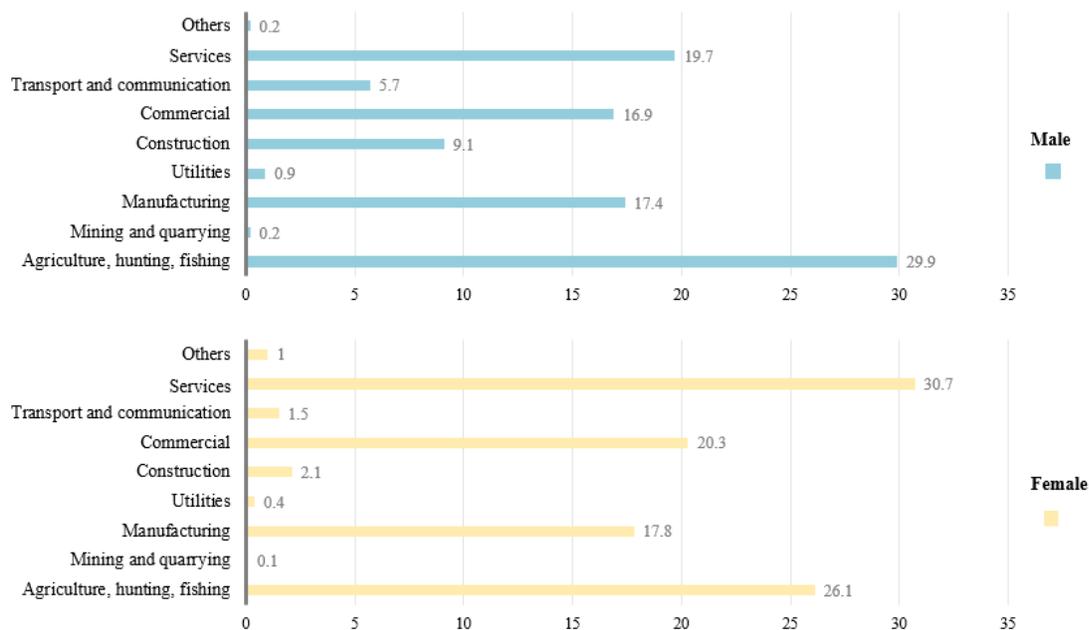
Compared to other developing countries, Thailand’s structural transformation from an agriculture-based economy to a manufacturing- and service-based economy has benefitted women with jobs that have more flexibility and match their skills and abilities (Rendall 2013). Thailand has seen a ‘feminization of the workforce’ (Paweenawat and McNown 2018), through which women have become the main players in the labor market. Between 2005 and 2019, while the employment share of women in the agricultural sector dramatically decreased, their share in the manufacturing sector stabilized, whereas in the service sector it increased from 41 percent to 53 percent (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4 - Employment share of prime working age (classified by sector) (%) (2005–2019)



Source: Author’s calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2005–2019

While the majority of men are employed in the agriculture, hunting, and fishing industry (29.9 percent), the majority of women are employed in the services industry (30.7 percent) (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 - Employment share of prime working age (classified by industry) (%) (2019)

Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2019.

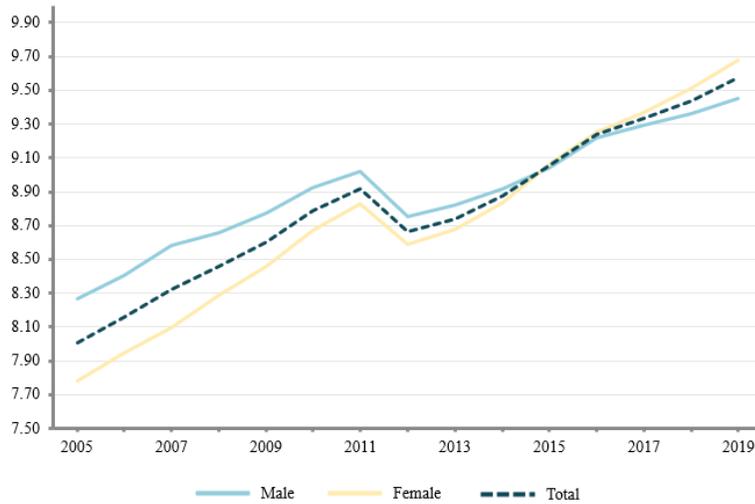
In addition to the transformation of the economy, which altered the pattern of female participation in the Thai labor market, the country's huge investment in education also significantly contributed to increased employment of Thai women.

Thailand perceives education as the main tool for human capital development. The country is one of the developing countries with a large investment in the education sector (around 4.8 percent of GDP or 20 percent of the total annual government budget) (OECD 2016). After the Thai government launched the compulsory years of education reform in 1978, the average years of schooling have increased significantly, and the country reached universal primary education in the late 1980s (Hawley 2004). Over the last 30 years, the Thai Government's education policy has made great progress in improving the population's education (Paweenawat 2020b).

Overall, the improvement of girls' education has been substantially supported by the government as a part of the strategy to achieve gender equality in the country (Knodel 1997). Furthermore, Thai families have no gender bias against supporting girls' education (Warunsiri and McNown 2010) or 'son preference' as many countries in East and South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa (Asadullah et al. 2020). In fact, Thai girls receive higher support for their education expenditures from their households than boys because Thai parents expect daughters to be primary care providers, and daughters' earnings are more 'reliable sources of remittances' compared to that of sons (Wongmonta and Glewwe 2017).

Consequently, the number of years that Thai women spend on receiving education has been improving significantly over time. While there was a gender gap regarding years of schooling from 2005, as of 2019, this gap no longer exists, and women's years of education are even slightly exceeding those of men (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6 - Year of education of prime working age (2005–2019)

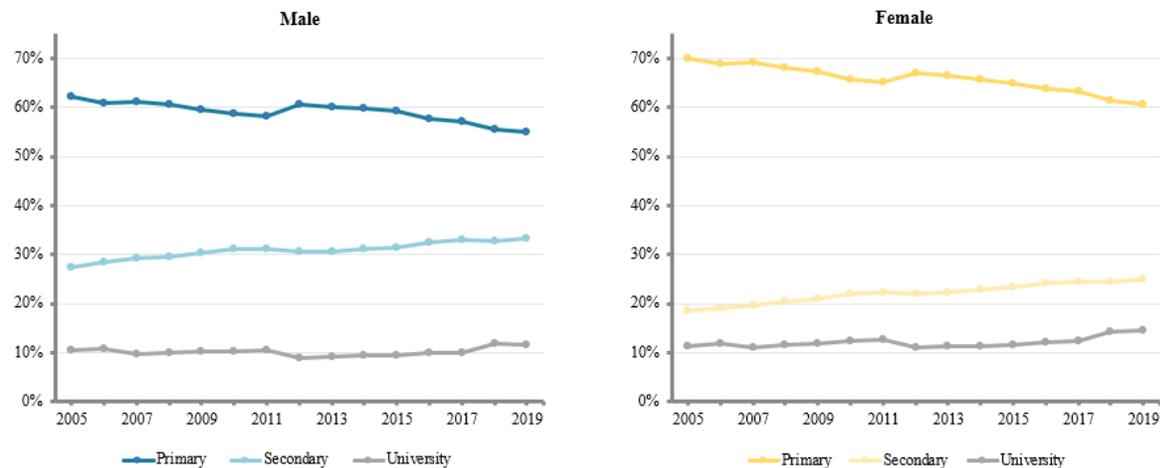


Source: Author’s calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

In addition, when particularly looking at the education level, even though the majority of the Thai workforce in both genders still consists of people who have completed primary education only (men 55 percent, women 60 percent), women have made significant progress in attaining a secondary education, increasing their share from 18 percent in 2005 to 25 percent in 2019. Furthermore, while the share of men who completed university level has been stable over time (around 10–11 percent), the share of women who completed university level has been growing and has even outpaced the share of their male counterparts in 2019 (14 percent) (Figure 5.7).

The structural economic transformation of the Thai economy due to the growth of its non-agricultural sectors and the country’s educational reform, which brought about an increase in the population’s education, have not only driven women to becoming the country’s main workforce but have also improved women’s working status in the labor market. Mainly, they have shifted women from unpaid/low-paid jobs in the informal sector to paid/higher-paid jobs in the formal sector.

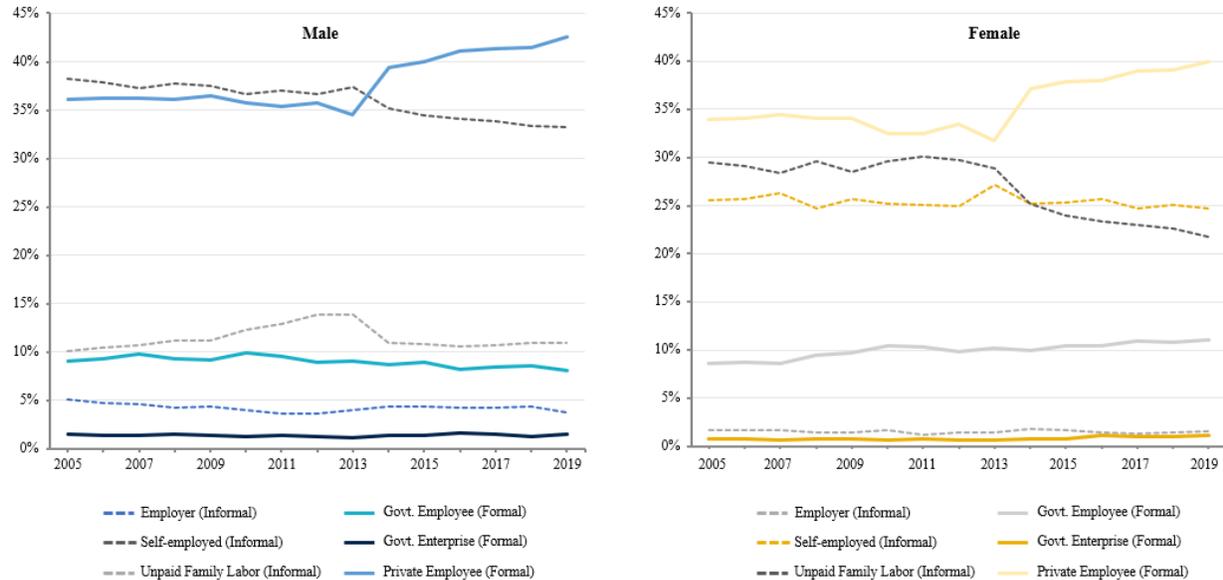
Figure 5.7 - Education level of prime working age (2005–2019)



Source: Author’s calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

During 2005–2019, the employment status of Thai women improved significantly. There was a sharp decline in the share of females employed as unpaid family workers and an increase in the share of women employed in the private sector (Figure 5.8).²⁰

Figure 5.8 - Share of formal and informal employment (classified by gender) (%)



Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

In addition, Thai women have shifted to work in middle- to high-skill occupations. Traditionally, many Thai women have worked in family-owned farms or taken the role of caregiver in the household as unpaid family workers (Pooittiwong 2017). Consequently, Thai women have historically had a high ratio in low-paid occupations (Liao and Paweenawat 2020b). Education has enabled women to work outside ‘the low-paying traditionally female occupations’ (Dougherty 2007). In recent years, employment in middle-skill and high-skill jobs has been increasing, and the share of women in middle-skill jobs has also increased (Paweenawat et al. 2019).

Between 2005 and 2019, the share of women in low-skill occupations, especially those who work as skilled agriculture and fisheries workers, sharply declined from 56.8 percent to 41.1 percent (Table 5.1). Thai women have been shifted to work more in the middle-skill occupations (increasing from 28.4 percent to 41 percent). Furthermore, the share of women in high-skill occupations increased, while the share of men dropped by 3 percentage points. Consequently, Thai women are more concentrated than men in middle- to high-skill jobs, predominantly as service workers.

²⁰ Note that employees in government, government enterprises, and private sectors are classified as working in the formal sector, while employers, self-employed workers, and unpaid family workers are classified as working in the informal sector (based on a report from the Labor Force Survey 2005–2019 on individual working status).

Table 5.1 - Occupation share of Thai workforces (classified by gender) (2005–2019)

Occupation	2005 (%)		2010 (%)		2015 (%)		2019 (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
High-skill occupations	17.9	14.8	13.1	13.6	15.6	17.7	14.1	17.9
Managers and legislators	9.6	4.3	5.0	2.1	5.7	3.3	4.9	3.4
Professionals	4.0	5.9	3.9	6.2	5.0	8.4	4.6	8.7
Technicians	4.3	4.6	4.2	5.2	4.9	6.0	4.6	5.9
Middle-skill occupations	22.4	28.4	26.3	33.8	31.4	37.9	32.8	41.0
Clerks	2.8	5.0	2.6	6.4	2.5	6.5	2.8	8.2
Service workers	8.2	18.3	12.5	22.4	14.6	24.1	15.6	25.9
Plant and machine operators	11.4	5.1	11.2	5.0	14.3	7.3	14.4	6.9
Low-skill occupations	59.7	56.8	60.7	52.6	53.0	44.3	53.1	41.1
Skilled agriculture and fisheries	36.3	36.4	35.6	34.5	28.3	26.9	27.4	24.6
Craft worker	13.1	7.6	15.0	6.8	15.9	6.2	15.9	5.4
Unskilled	10.3	12.7	10.1	11.3	8.9	11.2	9.8	11.0

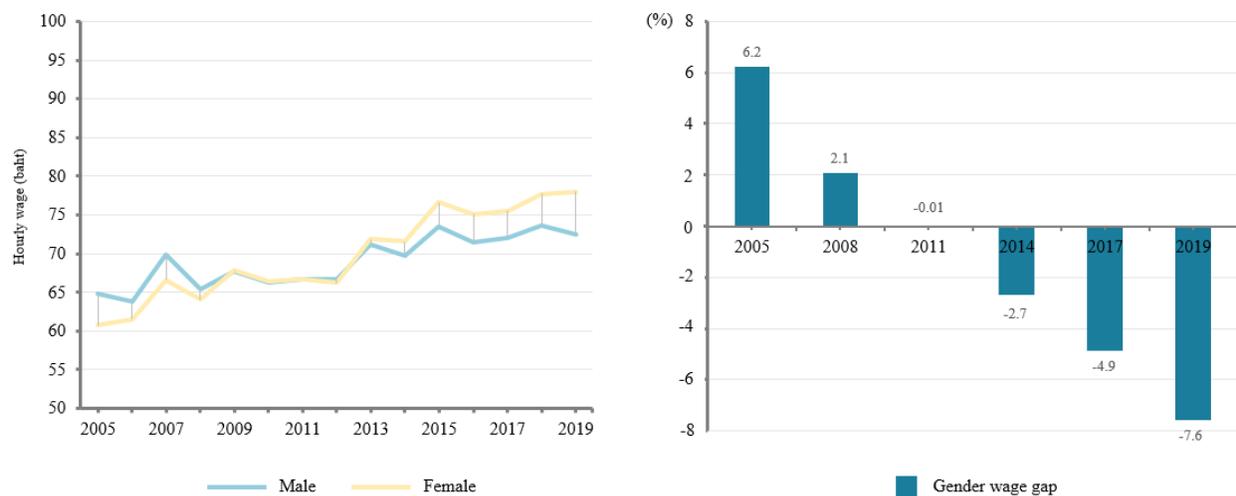
Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

(5.2) Gender Wage Gap

5.2.1 Gender wage gap in the formal sector

Overall, the gender wage gap in Thailand (of those who are in the prime working age group and report wages in the Labor Force Survey) began decreasing during 2005–2019 (Figure 5.9). Using the average hourly wage (to control different working hours) as the main measurement, the gender wage gap was around 6 percent in 2005 and has significantly decreased since then. Interestingly, there is no gender wage gap evident in 2011, wherein, on average, women received higher wages than men (around 7 percent more) in 2019 (thus, the gap becomes negative). Paweenawat, Vechbanyongratana, and Yoon (2017) suggested that the enforcement of the minimum wage law and minimum salary in the public sector in 2012/2013 disproportionately assisted female workers in the labor market. Furthermore, the increase of female employment in the public sector contributed to the diminishing of the gender wage gap because the average wage in the public sector is higher.

Figure 5.9 - Gender wage gap in Thailand (2005–2019)



Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

The major change in human capital investment has been the investment in women's education, which enhances the qualifications of women, drives a higher participation of women in the labor market, and improves their employment status leading to an increase in their wage, on average, and a possible narrowing of the gender wage gap over time (Paweenawat 2019b). Several previous studies (for example, Nakavachara 2010; Paweenawat and Liao 2019a; Srisomboon 2016²¹) found that the overall gender wage gap in Thailand has diminished significantly in recent decades and confirmed that the improvements in the education of women was the major contributor to this trend.

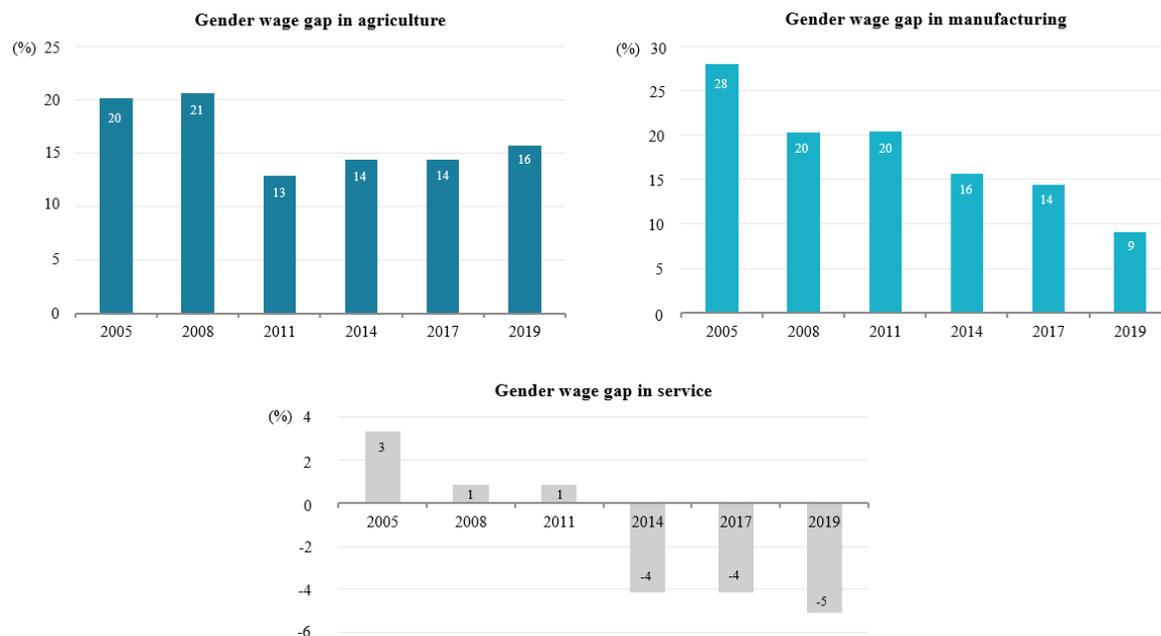
Paweenawat and Liao (2019a) have also suggested that changes in occupations, especially the steadily rising trend of the employment of highly skilled women (in professional jobs and related sectors) and shifts in industrial sectors (as more women move to the service sector) also contribute

²¹ <http://utcc2.utcc.ac.th/utccijbe/>.

to the narrowing of the gender gap in Thailand. The structural transformation in Thailand over the last three decades has benefited women more than men in terms of occupation matching and returns of education (Rendall 2013). The return on education in Thailand is higher for women than for men (Warunsiri and McNown, 2010). Note that the diminishing gender wage gap, due to the increase in the education of women and the development of the industrial sectors, is also found in other ASEAN countries, such as Malaysia (Ismail 2015) and Indonesia (Taniguchi and Tuwo 2014). Finally, an improvement in attitudes toward gender equality could contribute to the reduction of the overall gender wage gap in the country as well (Paweenawat and McNown 2018). Paweenawat and Liao (2019a) indicated a declining state of gender discrimination in the Thai labor market and an opening of more opportunities for Thai women in the workplace.²²

The patterns of change in the gender wage gap over time are quite different in the different industrial sectors (Figure 5.10). In the agricultural sector, there is a relatively small improvement in the gender wage gap over time, where the gap was 20 percent in 2005 and 16 percent in 2019. In contrast, for the manufacturing sector, the graph shows a significant decline in the gender wage gap from 28 percent in 2005 to only 9 percent in 2019. In the service sector, the preexisting wage gap was already much smaller compared to the other two sectors. However, there has also been a gradual reduction in the gender wage gap, and women's wages are higher than that of men in recent years. The service sector has contributed substantially to GDP growth and the increase of competitiveness of the service sector can help the process of gender equality and empowering women and girls through both the indirect channel (the economic growth) and the direct channel (consumption and employment) (Lipowiecka and Kiriti-Nganga 2016). Finally, the decrease in the gender wage gap in the manufacturing and service sectors drive the decrease in the overall gender wage gap over time.

²² Paweenawat and Liao (2019a) applied the Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition to identify the contribution of the unexplained part of gender wage gap, which could be viewed as the gender discrimination factor or prejudice against women in the labor market. This study found that the unexplained factors tend to decline steadily.

Figure 5.10 - Gender wage gap in agriculture, manufacturing, and service sectors (2005–2019)

Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

In addition, while Thailand has been successful in reducing the overall gender wage gap, Paweenawat and Liao (2019a) found that the parenthood wage gap (also called the parenthood/motherhood/fatherhood wage penalty, where workers without children receive higher wages than those with children) is persistent in the country and that its negative effect on wages is evident. Furthermore, the motherhood wage gap is much larger than fatherhood wage gap. The current data on the parenthood wage gap of those in the prime working age (based on Labor Force Survey) revealed that in 2019, the wage gap between mothers and non-mothers was around 11 percent, while for fathers and non-fathers it was around 3 percent.

According to Paweenawat and Liao (2019a), the difference in wages between workers with children and those without children can be explained by the differences in the working behaviors of male and female workers before and after having children. In the case of female workers, the lower average wages paid to them after having children are caused by their need to reduce their working hours to allocate time to raising children. Furthermore, institutional factors, such as the country's lack of support for the rights of women with children in matters of paid maternity and paternity leave, as well as government assistance in raising children, could deprive women with children employment in the labor market. For example, although the Labour Protection Act (No.7) B.E. 2562 (2019) extends maternity leave for Thai female employees from 90 days to 98 days and the Thai government approved the draft Royal Decree for a paid paternity leave of up to 15 days for Thai male state officials or male employees, the benefit is relatively low compared to other countries. Furthermore, the limited early childhood care and education (ECCE) services (especially for children under age 3) in Thailand restrict women's employment opportunities. The Thai government spending on pre-primary education is less than 0.3 percent of GDP (2012-2014), which is less than regional average (UN 2019b). NESDB (2015) revealed that only 61 childcare centers in the workplaces in the country and 22,000 public childcare facilities for the children aged 2 to 5 years old.

The gender wage gap could be explained by various factors, such as mothers' reduced time at work due to constraints on work schedules and travel, as well as employer bias against mothers in employment and promotion decisions.

Becker (1985) suggests that married women spending time on household work and childcare might decrease the effort that they devote to market jobs and thus reduce their wages compared to men with similar characteristics. Liao and Paweenawat (2020a) found that motherhood decreases the labor supply of Thai women in both working hours and labor force participation as they are required spend time for childcare. However, there is currently no evidence from Thailand that women/mothers are less productive than men.

In the case of male workers, most previous studies found that having children has a positive effect. Given that in most societies, men are the breadwinners of the family (while women are more likely to be secondary earners), and after having children they tend to work more, and thus their wages usually increase thereafter (Paweenawat and Liao 2019a). Cools and Strom (2014) suggest that the wage penalty for fathers in Norway was caused by the rising involvement of men in childrearing.

5.2.2 Gender wage gap in the informal sector

The informal sector is an important composition in the Thai labor market. Its effect on the development of inequality and reduction of poverty has drawn concerns, and it distorts the official indicators that reflect whether the distribution of public resources is done efficiently (BOT 2019). Although in 1998 the Thai Government approved the Labor Protection Act, the benefits relating to informal workers are unclear as many employers perform outside the legal jurisdiction (Pooittiwong 2017).

Table 5.2 - Number of male and female workers in formal and informal sectors (2017–2019)

	2017		2018		2019	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age 25-54 (thousands)						
Informal	8,885	7,464	8,776	7,375	8,395	6,838
Formal	4,088	3,851	4,268	3,967	3,908	3,780
Total	12,973	11,315	13,044	11,341	12,303	10,618
All age (thousands)						
Informal	14,246	11,257	14,388	11,452	13,750	10,661
Formal	4,962	4,638	5,216	4,772	4,759	4,519
Total	19,208	15,895	19,604	16,224	18,509	15,180
Share in each sector-under each gender (%)						
Informal	68.5	66.0	67.3	65.0	68.2	64.4
Formal	31.5	34.0	32.7	35.0	31.8	35.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Informal Employment Survey 2017–2019.

The informal employment survey conducted during 2017–2019 was used to classify workers into formal and informal employment to study the gender wage gap in both sectors. To define workers in informal employment, the definition of the National Statistical Office (NSO), which describes them as “employed persons who are not protected and not eligible for social security

provision,” was adopted in this study (BOT 2019). Thus, informal workers are those who are not covered by social security. In 2019, there were 15.2 million workers, classified into 8.3 million men and 6.8 million women in the informal sector, accounting for 68 percent of men and 64 percent of women (Table 5.2). During 2017–2019, the majority of the Thai workforce (over 65 percent) was in the informal sector, while around 35 percent was in the formal sector.

There exists a gender wage gap in informal employment. While the gender wage gaps of prime working age in formal employment are relatively low (around 4–6 percent), the gender wage gap in informal employment in Thailand is high at 9–11 percent (Table 5.3). This result is consistent with Paweenawat, Vechbanyongratana, and Yoon (2017), which found that women in the informal sector, focusing only a group of self-employed workers, have a lower income than their male counterparts (around 17–24 percent).

Table 5.3 - Gender wage gap in the formal and informal sectors (2017–2019)

		2017		2018		2019	
		Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
Hourly wage (baht)	Male	70.8	44.6	72.4	45.3	72.9	46.0
	Female	66.6	40.0	69.3	41.2	69.7	42.1
Gender wage gap (%)		6.3	11.5	4.5	10.2	4.7	9.2

Source: Author’s calculations based on micro data from Informal Employment Survey 2017–2019.

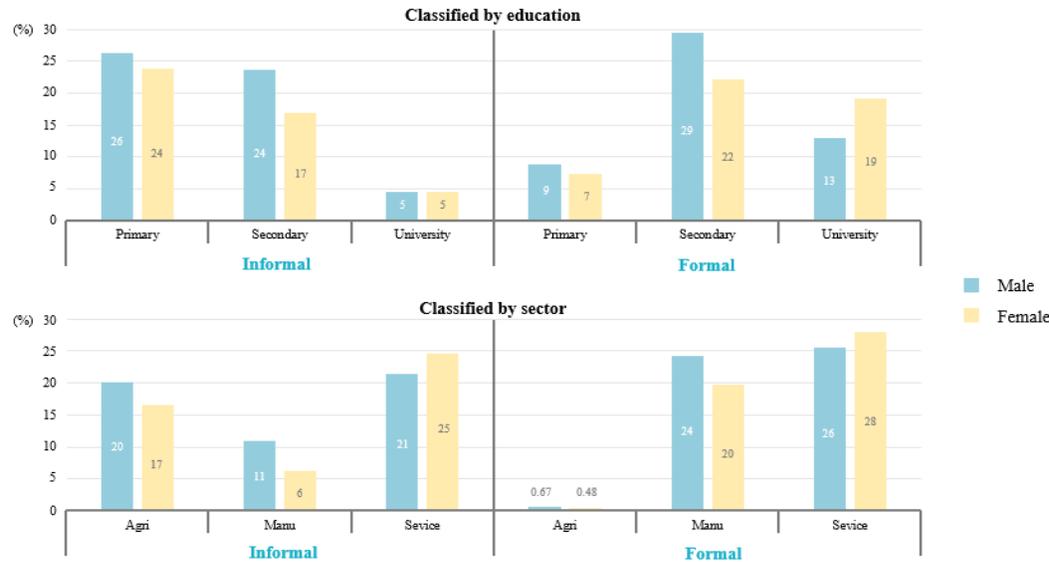
Then, by applying the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition, we roughly decompose the factors constituting the gender wage gap in each sector for men and women in 2017, 2018, and 2019 and find higher average wages for men than women in both sectors. Both in the informal and formal sectors, there is a positive gender wage gap, where the gap is higher in informal employment than in formal employment.²³

Education is the main factor contributing to the large gender gap in informal employment; a large number of women in the informal sector have obtained only primary or secondary education and are employed in the agriculture sector (Figure 5.11), leading to low wages. As suggested by Bitran (2014), most of the informal workers are in the agricultural sector, living in rural areas, and working in low-skill jobs. Although Thailand has a relatively ‘comprehensive social security system’, the majority of benefits cover only non-agricultural formal workers, and a large proportion of informal workers are not included in the system (Deyo 2012). In addition, based on social norm, women are restricted by spatial mobility and their informal economic activities are home based. Fewer skills, less work experience, limitations in accessing funding, and family roles account for the gender gap in the informal sector (Chant and McIlwaine 2009). BOT (2019) concluded that the structural problems of the labor market in Thailand include the fact that large proportions of workers in the agriculture sector do not have access to social welfare and many workers are underemployed, especially in the agriculture sector. As a result, in Thailand, a

²³ Note that education, industries, and occupations continue to play a significant role in explaining the gender gap in both formal and informal employment. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the unexplained part of this gap is still large, suggesting that the existence of discrimination is contributing to the gender wage gap in both sectors. However, the unexplained part is smaller in formal employment than in informal employment, which may suggest a lower degree of discrimination in the formal sector compared to the informal one.

large share of informal workers are in the lowest earning group and the gap between informal and formal workers persists across all income groups (ILO 2015).

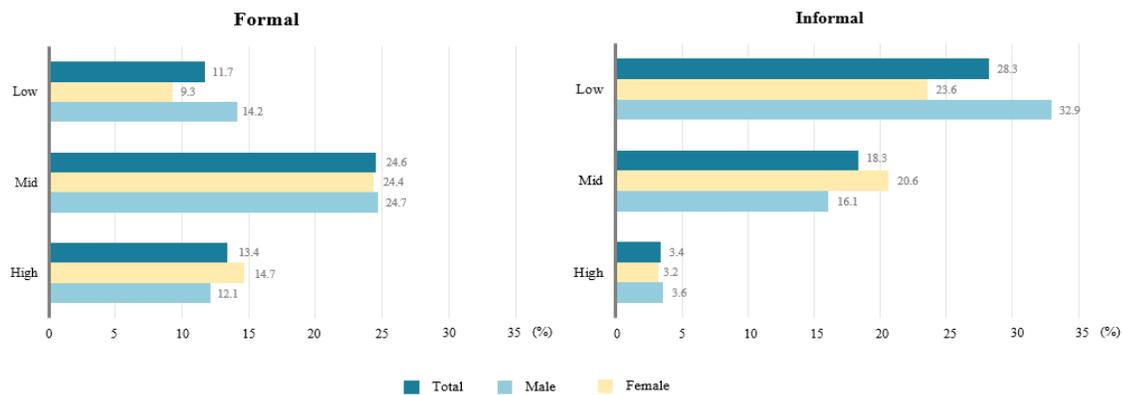
Figure 5.11 - Employment share in formal and informal sectors (classified by education and sector) (2017–2019)



Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Informal Employment Survey 2017–2019.

In addition, the different types of skill jobs for men and women could explain the gender wage gap (Paweenawat et al. 2019). While the shares of men and women in middle-skill jobs in the formal sector are not much different (around 24 percent), the share of women in low-skill jobs in the informal sector (23.6 percent) is much higher than that in the formal sector (9.3 percent) (Figure 5.12). Thus, men and women's earning abilities in the formal sector should not be much different, leading to a lower gender gap.²⁴

²⁴ Note that based on the data from the Labor Force Survey (2005–2019) (section 5.1), although the share of informal workers of women and men do not have much difference, the share of women in the informal sector is higher among unpaid family workers than men, while the share of self-employed men is higher than women. Furthermore, the distribution of workers in each employment status in the formal sector is relatively equal for men and women. This may suggest that, in the informal sector, since a much higher share of women are unpaid workers, their earning ability should be lower than that of men, while in the formal sector, it should be more equal. Therefore, the estimation from using the informal employment survey (2017–2019) reveals that in informal employment the gender wage gap is still high, and in formal employment the gender wage gap is lower.

Figure 5.12 - Employment share in formal and informal sectors (classified by skill) (2017–2019)

Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Informal Employment Survey 2017–2019.

(5.3) Gender Gap in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Access

Technological progress and improvement in ICT has been widely influencing Thai society and transforming Thai people's lives for the past 10 years. The government has been promoting the country's transition to a digital economy under the theme 'Thailand 4.0'. Consequently, at the current stage, ICT has not only affected Thai people's everyday life but has also provided a new opportunity for employment in the labor market as well as access to government welfare programs.

Sicat et al. (2020) suggested that policy makers pay more attention to women during the transformation of the digital era and take advantage of ICT and digital technology in reducing the existing gender gap due to its important role in allowing more women to get involved in the labor market. The digital gender gap is stable and has become worse over time, where female internet users are over 250 million less than men globally and the gender gap in ICT is much higher in developing countries than in developed ones (ITU 2016).

Based on the measurement of ICT access in three main channels—mobile, computer, and the internet—the recent survey on households' use of ICT in Thailand in 2018 (Q4) revealed the following information on gender gaps in access to ICT:

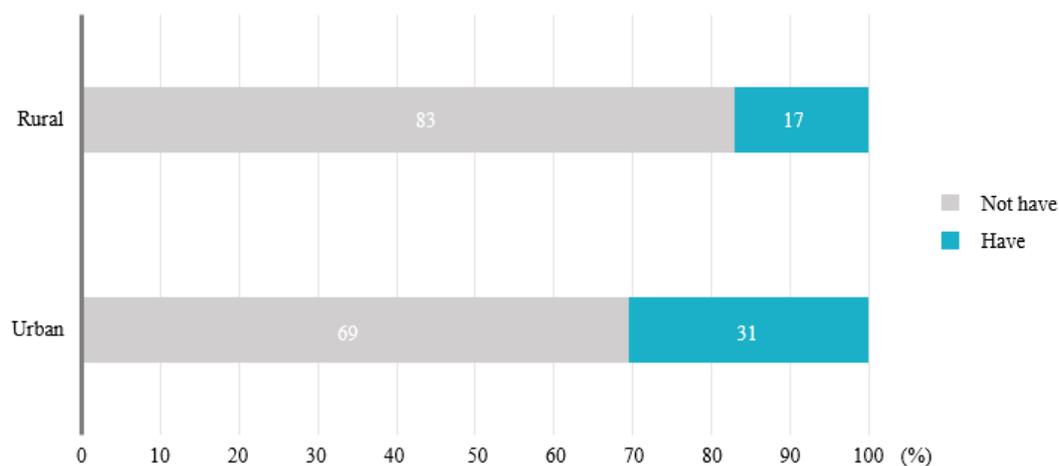
The majority of Thai people have mobile phones and there is no gender gap in ownership. Overall, 84 percent of both men and of women have a mobile phone. The prime age group (ages 25–54 years) does not have any gender or geographical difference in mobile phone ownership. A higher share of younger (young schooling age, 6–15 years; minimum working age in Thailand is 15) or older (age over 60 as the official retirement age is 60) urban residents have mobile phones than the rural residents. In addition, there exists a gender gap in mobile phone ownership in the older age group, where older men have a higher share of mobiles than older women (around 8 percent gap) (Table 5.6).

Table 5.4 - Share of Thai people having a mobile phone (classified by gender and age group) (%) (2018)

Having mobile	Male	Female	Gap
Overall	84	84	0
Age 6-15			
Urban	72	74	-2
Rural	68	70	-2
Age 25-54			
All	96	97	-1
Urban	97	97	0
Rural	95	97	-2
Over 60			
Urban	85	77	8
Rural	79	71	8

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from Household Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology 2018.

However, urban households have a higher share of computer ownership at home (31 percent) than rural households (17 percent) (Figure 5.13). Overall, the gender gap in computer ownership is around 5.6 percent. While there is a small gender gap in computer ownership in rural areas (only 2 percent gap), there exists a large gender gap in computer ownership in urban areas (55 percent of men and 45 percent of women have a computer, or 10 percent gender gap). Furthermore, the data revealed that at higher education levels, a higher proportion own a computer and there is a higher gender gap in ownership (Table 5.5).

Figure 5.13 - Share of households having a computer (%) (2018)

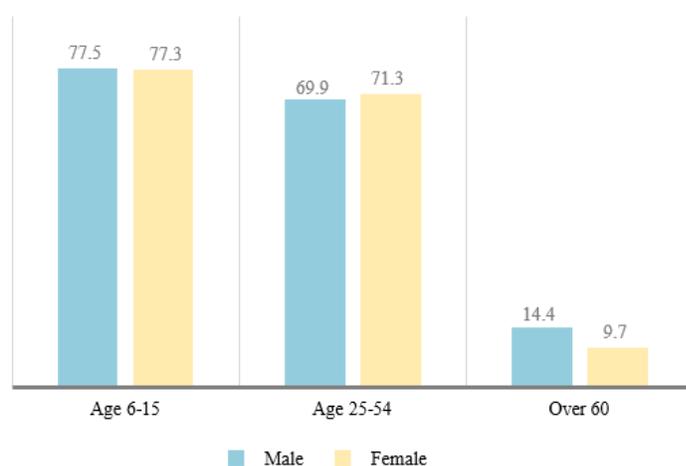
Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from Household Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology 2018.

Table 5.5 - Share of Thai people having a computer (classified by gender) (%) (2018)

Individual has either computer at work or at home (25-54)	Male	Female	Gap
Area			
Urban	52.1	45.4	6.7
Rural	40.6	38.1	2.5
Education			
Primary	24.5	21.8	2.7
Secondary	33.1	24.8	8.3
University	59.8	50.5	9.3

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from Household Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology (2018).

The prime working age group and younger group have a higher share of access to the internet and do not have much difference in accessing the internet across genders (70 percent of both men and women can access the internet). However, the older group has the lowest number of people who can access the internet; furthermore, men have higher access to the internet than women (men 14.4 percent vs women 9.7 percent) (Figure 5.14).

Figure 5.14 - Share of Thai people having internet access (classified by age group) (%) (2018)

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from Household Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology 2018.

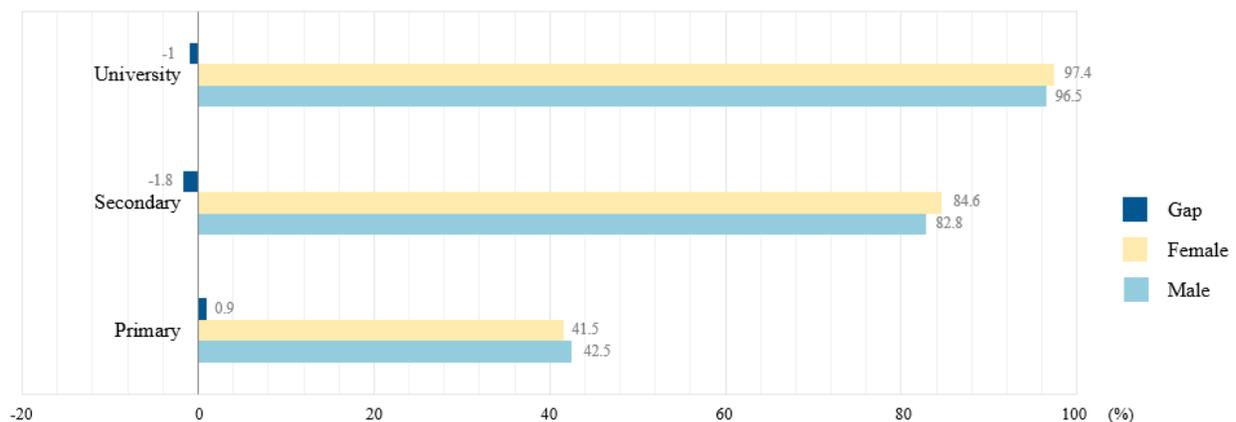
Furthermore, while the other groups do not have a significant gender gap in internet access, the gender gap in internet access is high among older people (11 percent gap in Bangkok and 7 percent gap in urban areas). Sicat et al. (2020) explained that women are always slower in accessing ICT-related technology than men. In other words, women have obstacles in accessing ICT technology as they have lower level of skills, education, language, and technical literacy compared to men in developing countries. However, in the younger generation, there is not much difference across genders. And, for some regions, women have higher access to the internet compared to men, for example, in the prime working age group in the northeast region (women 57.3 percent versus men 52.0 percent) (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 - Share of Thai people having internet access (classified by region and age) (%) (2018)

	Male	Female	Gap
Age 6-15			
Bangkok	89.7	85.1	4.6
Central	78.0	77.9	0.1
North	79.2	82.3	-3.1
Northeast	74.1	74.0	0.2
South	75.4	73.4	2.0
Age 25-54			
Bangkok	90.6	88.8	1.8
Central	77.8	77.8	0.0
North	60.4	63.0	-2.5
Northeast	52.0	57.3	-5.3
South	65.8	67.7	-1.9
Over 60			
Bangkok	41.5	30.5	11.0
Central	17.5	10.5	7.0
North	10.2	7.5	2.7
Northeast	7.6	4.1	3.5
South	12.4	9.1	3.3

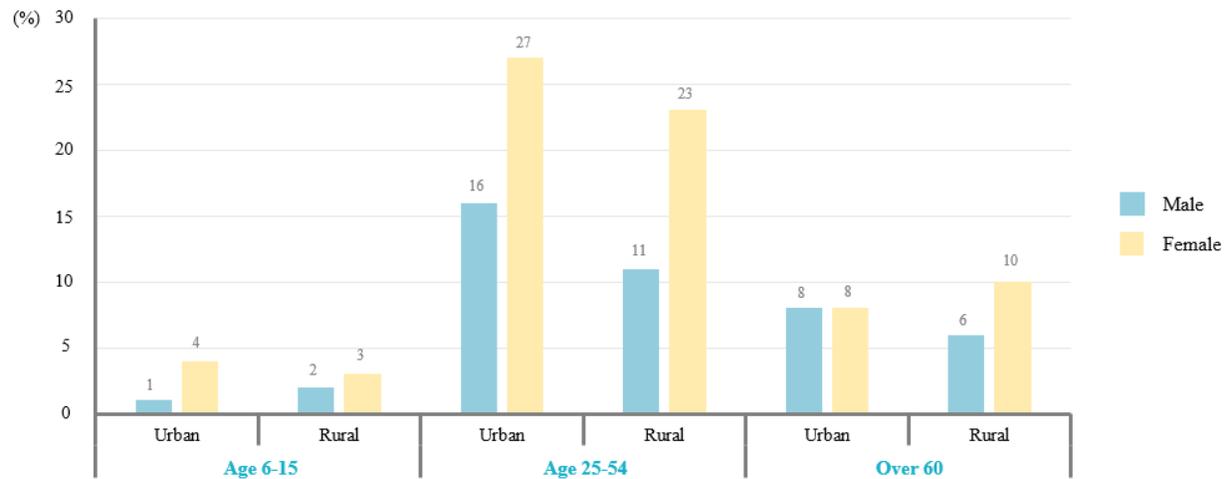
Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from Household Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology 2018.

In addition, similar to the data on computer access, people with higher education have higher access to the internet. The lowest number of access to the internet is those with primary education (only 42 percent; those with university and secondary ranged from 80 to 90 percent), but there

Figure 5.15 - The share of Thai people having internet access (classified by education) (%) (2018)

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from Household Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology 2018.

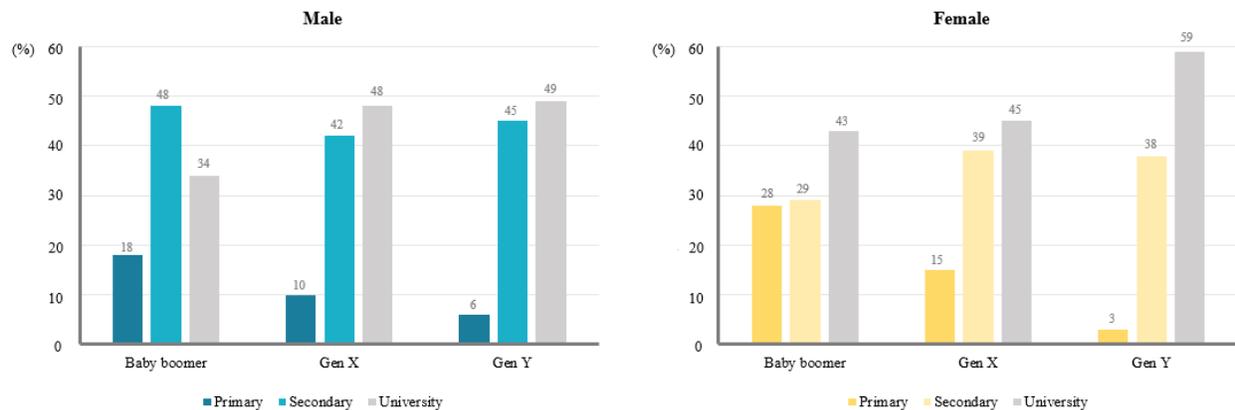
Clearly, in e-commerce activities, women have a high active involvement in both purchasing and doing business activities, compared to men. First, both men and women living in urban areas have a higher share of online purchasing activity. While women tend to have a higher probability of online purchasing than men, prime age workers have a higher probability of purchasing products and services than other age groups (Figure 5.16)

Figure 5.16 - Share of Thai people purchasing product/services on the internet (%) (2018)

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from Household Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology 2018.

Second, in the e-commerce business, both men and women in Generation X and Generation Y with university education have a higher share of doing business online compared to Baby Boomers. The highest number of people using the internet to do business is women in Generation Y with university degrees (59 percent). In addition, at the university level, even men in Generation X had a slightly higher share of doing business online than women by around 3 percent, women in the Baby Boomer generation are more likely to conduct online business than men by around 9 percent (Figure 5.17).

Sicat et al. (2020) studied the gender aspects in e-commerce and suggested that digital technology can empower women in social and economic areas by creating more jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities. Also, digital technology can reduce working barriers for women, including mobility constraints and discrimination, and provide a more women-friendly financial and business-related society. For example, digital technology can connect women to work/business in various locations with flexible working hours and save time and cost. E-commerce can reduce the difficulties of entry for small- and middle-size business. Furthermore, evidence has suggested that the internet has benefitted female entrepreneurs by decreasing the cost of trade, with more women represented in online businesses than in traditional ones. For example, in China, over 50 percent of online shops are owned by women on Alibaba, while less than 20 percent of small enterprises have women as top managers.

Figure 5.17 - Share of Thai people doing business online (%) (2018)

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from Household Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology (2018).

According to the Survey of e-Commerce Status in Thailand (2006–2014) from the NSO and the Value of e-Commerce Survey in Thailand (2015–2017) from the Electronic Transaction Development Agency (ETDA), there is a high value of e-commerce in Thailand (ranked no. 1 in ASEAN) and around 70 percent of e-commerce businesses are small (around one to five people). Recent data from ETDA (2019) showed that the value of e-commerce in Thailand increased from THB 2.2 trillion in 2015 to THB 4.9 trillion in 2020.

The case study of female entrepreneurs in Thailand.

Shannon Kalayanamitr is one of the of female entrepreneurs in the e-commerce industry in Thailand. She joined Lazada, an online shipping website, in 2011 and eventually left it to co-found an e-commerce platform for women, Moxy, in 2013. Moxy later (in 2016) merged with Bilna and became Orami. Kalayanamitr became a venture partner at GOBI Partners in mid-2018. According to her, around one-third of GOBI's 250 portfolio companies are founded by women, which indicates that the firm deems women to be underserved, and thus it has assigned over 50 percent of the quota to women-led businesses in different areas in both China and Southeast Asia.

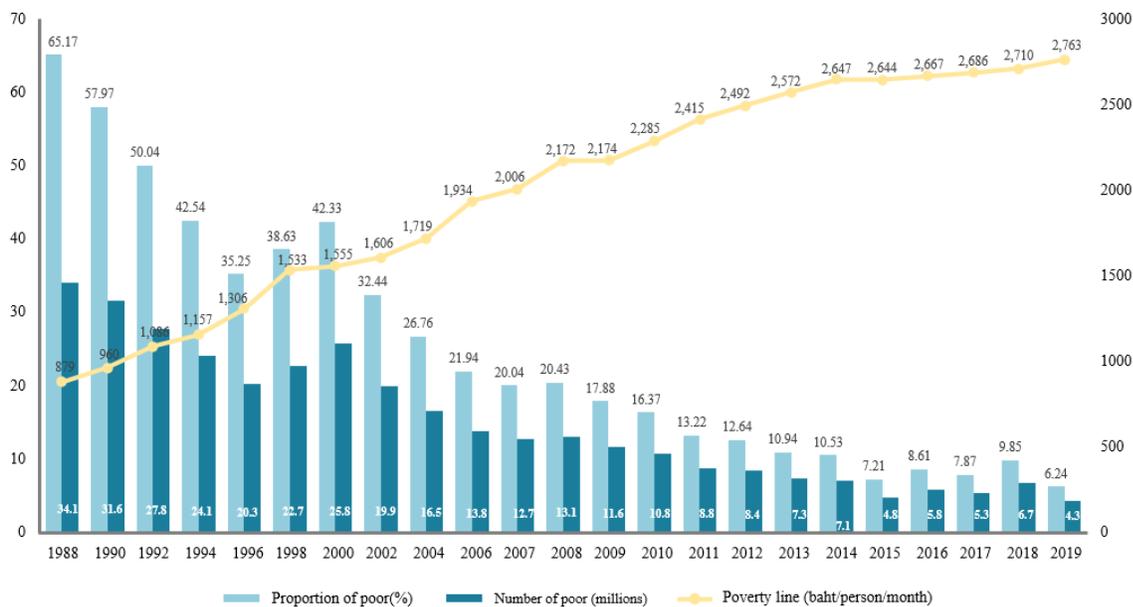
Source: Topp 2020.

Finally, with a high number of women doing business online, these findings clearly show that the internet can open opportunities for women under the gig economy, especially women who use the online platform in Thailand. Although there is no official report on the number of gig workers in Thailand, the Economic Intelligence Center (SCB 2017) estimated that around 30 percent of the Thai workforce identify themselves as gig workers. In 2018, the gig economy in Thailand increased as more workers performed their work through online platforms such as the ride-hailing service Grab and freelancing (Hicks 2018).

(5.4) Incidence of Poverty

Thailand has been successful in decreasing poverty. The official poverty rate declined from 65.2 percent in 1988 to 9.85 percent in 2018 (World Bank 2020d). However, the poverty rate increased in 2016 and 2018, which suggests the vulnerability of households during economic downturns. Meanwhile, during 2017–2019, social assistance programs provided by the Thai Government, including the expansion of the welfare program, largely contributed to poverty reduction. The recent official report on poverty rates in Thailand by the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) (2020) indicates that the number of people living below the poverty line (defined as having an income of THB 2,763 per month per person) in 2019 is 4.3 million, accounting for 6.24 percent of the Thai population, a drop from 6.7 million in 2018 (or 7.87 percent of the total population) (Figure 5.18).

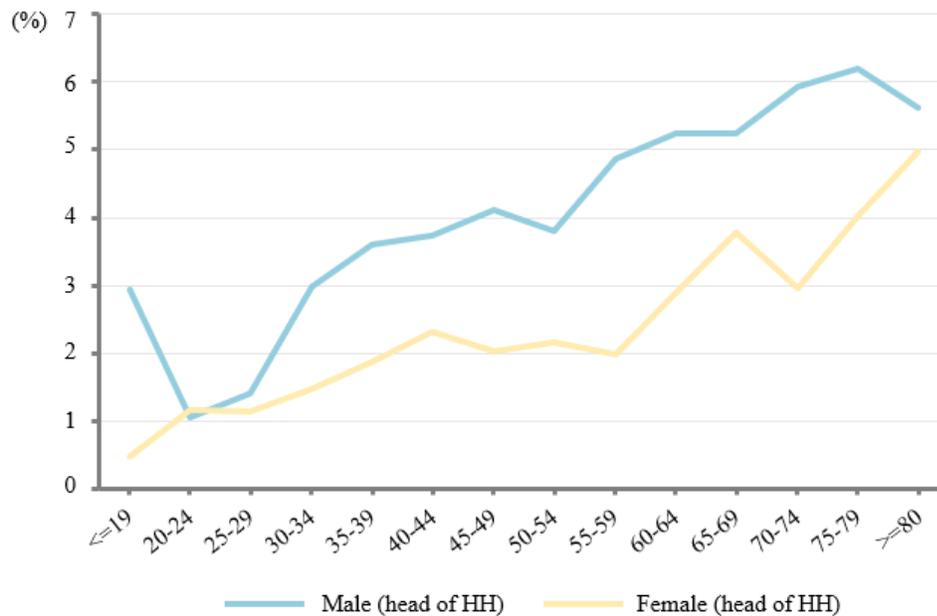
Figure 5.18 - Poverty rate in Thailand (1988–2019)



Source: NESDC 2020.

The poverty rate diversifies significantly with age and gender (Figure 5.19).²⁵ Men’s poverty rate is higher than that of women and the rate increases with age. The gap between men and women decreases gradually as they grow older. The poverty rate is highest for men at 75–79 years and women at over 80 years. This figure is consistent with the findings of the World Bank (2012) using the SES 2010, which found that the elderly form the poorest group in the country and that the poverty rates of men are higher than those of women at all ages. It suggested that Thailand has many pension programs but still lacks a “pension and provident fund supervision agency or a consolidated financial institution regulator” that could clearly formulate the country’s pension policy (World Bank 2012).

²⁵ By classifying a group of those living below the poverty line by age and gender (based on data from the 2019 Household Socioeconomic Survey [SES 2019], using characteristics of the head of household).

Figure 5.19 -Poverty rate (classified by age and gender) (2019)

Source: SES 2019.

The majority of the heads of households living under the poverty line are found to be male (63.4 percent) than female (36.6 percent) (Table 5.9).²⁶ This is not surprising as the majority of heads of households in Thailand are male, but the group that should be of the highest concern is female heads of households, of which approximately 40 percent are widows. In addition, the data revealed that 77 percent of these people have attained only a primary education (men 49 percent versus 27 percent women) and most live in rural areas and in the northeast region (46 percent) (Table 5.7). Paweenawat and McNown (2014) suggested that the differing years of education of the heads of households is the main factor causing income inequality across Thai households.

²⁶ By focusing on the characteristics of the head of households (age ≥ 25) who are working and living under the poverty line or the so-called 'working poor' (ILO 2013).

Table 5.7 - Share of Thai people living below the poverty line (classified by their characteristics) (%) (2019)

	Male (head of HH)	Female (head of HH)
Total (age \geq 25)	63.4	36.6
Education		
Primary	49.4	27.2
Secondary	2.8	1.4
University	6.9	5.7
Regions		
Bangkok	0.2	0.4
Central	6.9	6.9
North	16.4	7.5
Northeast	30.4	16.4
South	9.7	5.4
Area		
Municipal	12.8	8.3
Non-Municipal	50.6	28.3

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from SES 2019.

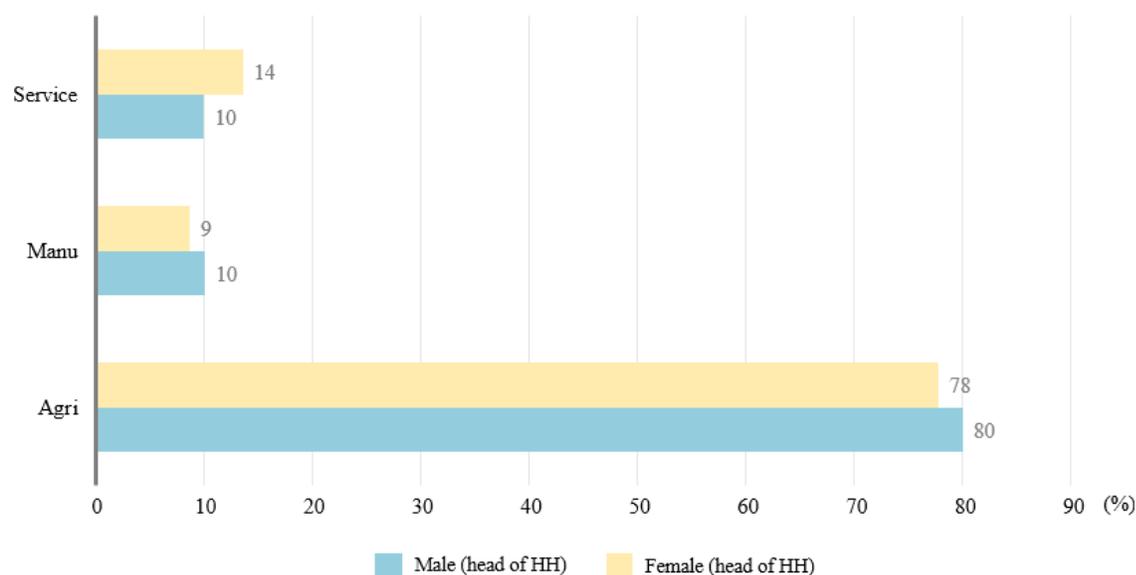
Among this group, 80 percent of the households have either children or elderly people in the household (88 percent of male-headed households versus 89 percent of female-headed households) (Figure 5.20). There is a highly persistent degree of poverty among households, particularly among female-headed households with children (Klasen, Lechtenfeld, and Povel 2011). The higher the number of children in a household, the lower the household earnings as children may hinder parents from reaching their potential income levels (Paweenawat and McNown 2014). To tackle this issue, the Thai Government recently released a policy on a child benefit grant, that is, a monthly allowance for those who have children ages 0–6, targeting families living in poverty (NESDB 2015).²⁷

²⁷ In the beginning, the amount of grant was THB 400 for children up to one year old, then in 2016 it became THB 600 for children up to three years old, and in 2019, it was expanded to children up to six years old. According to UNICEF (2019), the Child Support Grant (CSG) is a “non-contributory, non-conditional targeted cash transfer” for poor families taking care of children ages 0–6. The eligible family must have an average income lower than THB 100,000 per year. At present, 1.01 million Thai children (or around 23 percent of Thai children below 6 years of age) have obtained this monthly CSG.

Figure 5.20 - Percentage of households having either children or elderly in the household (2019)

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from SES 2019.

Furthermore, those living under the poverty line mostly work in the agricultural sector (80 percent of men versus 78 percent of women) (Figure 5.21) and in low-skill jobs (both men and women account for 91 percent) (Table 5.8). In addition, the share of households headed by men has a similar rate of accessing the social welfare benefits provided by the government as households headed by women do (Table 5.9). For example, approximately 97–98 percent of households with male/female heads in Thailand have a universal health card. However, even though the shares of men and women workers are not much different in terms of their employment and social welfare benefit access, evidence in many countries (Asfaw and Admassie 2004; Chirwa 2005) showed that female-headed households are less likely to access production technology compared to men, leading to a gender economic gap at a later stage. Some empirical evidence indicates that Thai households headed by women are linked to higher poverty (Deolalikar 2002) and that this group encounters higher uncertainty regarding their earnings compared to their male counterparts (Paweenawat 2020c).

Figure 5.21 - Share of Thai people living under poverty line (classified by sector) (2019)

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from SES 2019.

Table 5.8 - Share of Thai people living under poverty line (classified by occupation) (%) (2019)

	Male (head of HH)	Female (head of HH)
Managers and legislators	0.79	0.19
Professionals	0.12	0.02
Technicians	0.32	0.07
Clerks	0.36	0.43
Service workers	4.80	6.59
Skilled agriculture and fisheries	72.87	68.51
Craft worker	5.36	4.72
Plant and machine operators	1.68	1.33
Unskilled	13.71	18.15

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from SES 2019.

Table 5.9 - Share of Thai people living under poverty line having social welfare benefit (%) (2019)

Having welfare or not	Male (HH)	Female (HH)
Have universal health card	97.5	98.6
Have social pension for elderly (if household has members age >= 60)	90.8	93.0
Have social assistance for disabled person (if household has disabled members)	78.1	80.0

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from SES (2019).

Female-headed households tend to be the ‘poorest of the poor’ and are more exposed to poverty due to constrained access to formal and informal credit and other mechanisms of risk operation (Chant 2015). In addition, most women who head households suffer a ‘double day burden’ as they have to manage both their household chores as well as being the family breadwinner at the same time (Moghadam 1997). Although these women engage in more remunerated works in the labor market, they also have to perform unpaid family work and household chores (Chant 2013). Furthermore, as female heads tend to not be able to “properly support their families or ensure their well-being” (Mehra et al. 2000), the prospect of intergenerational transmission of poverty in female-headed households increases (Chant 2015). World Bank (2020d) clearly stated the “the inequality of opportunities experienced by Thai children today; Inequality exists in early stages of life, meaning that Thai children do not have a level playing field.” In other words, children are restricted to get their full potential with the inequality of access to opportunities and the inequality will stay and exacerbate in their later life. GDIM (2018) reported that Thai children born in the lowest household income quantile are less likely to grow to be adults in the upper household income quantile of the country. Furthermore, Paweenawat (2020b) presented empirical evidence on the persistently high intergenerational transmission of human capital among Thai households. In other words, there is a strong impact of parental education on child educational and occupational outcomes, which implies that Thai individuals’ well-being largely depends on their parental background.

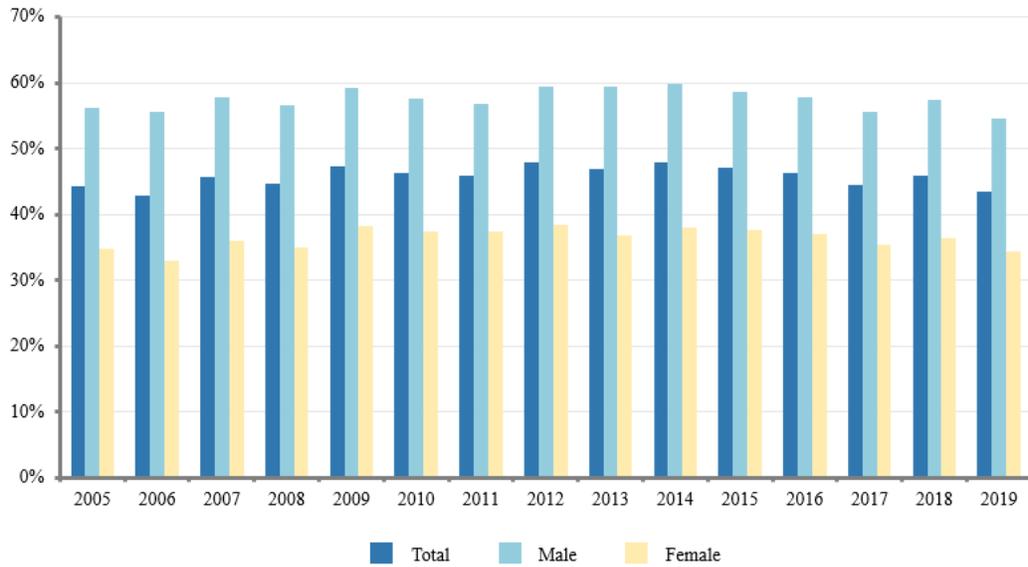
(5.5) Aging Population

Thailand will be an aged society by 2022 (as the share of population over 60 years will be over 20 percent) and will become a hyper-aged society by 2035 (as the share of population over 65 years will be over 20 percent) (World Bank 2016). Thailand has the second highest share of older people among ASEAN countries (Singapore has the first) (United Nations 2015). However, Thailand is still falling short in supporting older people to live a desirable life after retirement age (Phijaisanit 2016). Older people in Thailand have the highest poverty rate and are the poorest group (as presented in the previous section).

The main income sources of older people are from filial support and their work (United Nations 2013). Pension provision in Thailand plays a small role in ensuring elderly income and only five percent of Thai elderly in 2014 claimed that pension is their primary source of income (World Bank, 2021b). Currently, the pension system in Thailand is under a three-pillar income security system. According to the World Bank (1994), the first pillar is a universal program targeting the general group to prevent poverty, the second covers occupational pension programs, and the third includes voluntary programs. Informal workers still lack access to social security due to the programs available to them being most likely voluntary (Fujioka and Thangphet 2009). As a result, workers without pension are normally from a lower socioeconomic status, work in the informal sector, and tend to stay in the labor force until their late lives (Paweenawat and Liao 2020a). In addition to the access to pensions, there exists potential gender gap in contributory pensions/amounts of retirement funds available to all persons of retirement age. This could be particularly relevant for assessing the design of the planned National Pension Fund from a gender equality perspective. A key contributing factor to existing and potential gaps is the fact that, based on the 2021 “Women, Business and the Law”, periods of absence due to childcare are not accounted for in pension benefits in Thailand. Consequently, although the government has recently (in 2015) implemented the National Saving Fund under pillar three, it remains undersubscribed by people, and the benefit of the old age allowance needs to be improved to link it with the country’s poverty line (Knodel and Teerawichitchainan 2017).

Thus, unlike in developed countries, a large share of older people in Thailand are still in the labor market. Between 2005 and 2019, for the aging Thai population (over 60 years), over 55 percent of men and around 35 percent of women were still in the labor force. In addition, the LFPR of men was higher than that of women and the gap in the LFPR was stable over time, showing about a 20 percent gap (Figure 5.22). The LFPR of elderly men is higher than that of elderly women as the traditional role of women is expected to be taking care of the household chores and childcare. The national Survey of Older Persons in Thailand (SOPT) indicates that approximately two-thirds of the elderly live with their children. As a result, elderly females may be assisting with both household chores as well as ‘grandparenting’. Adhikari, Soonthornhada, and Haseen (2011) found evidence that elderly Thai females living with children tend to withdraw from the labor market.

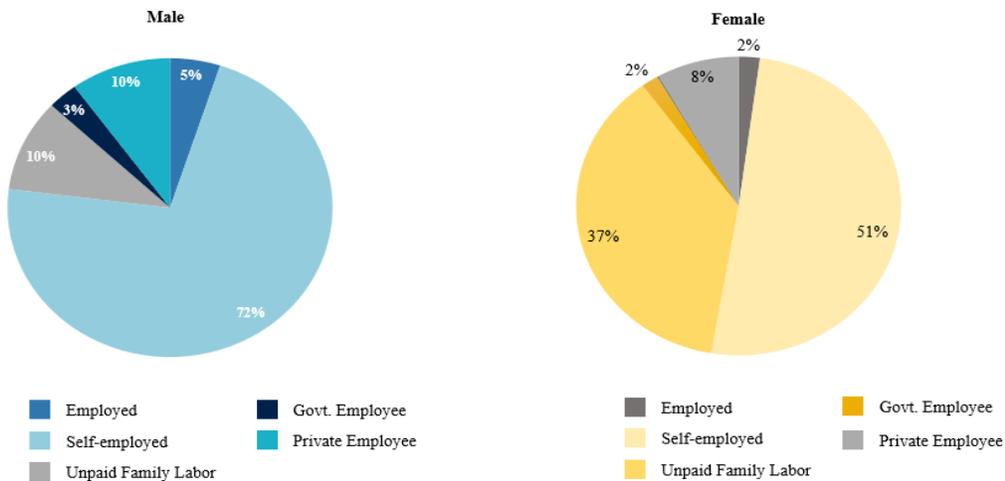
Figure 5.22 - LFPR of older people (2005–2019)



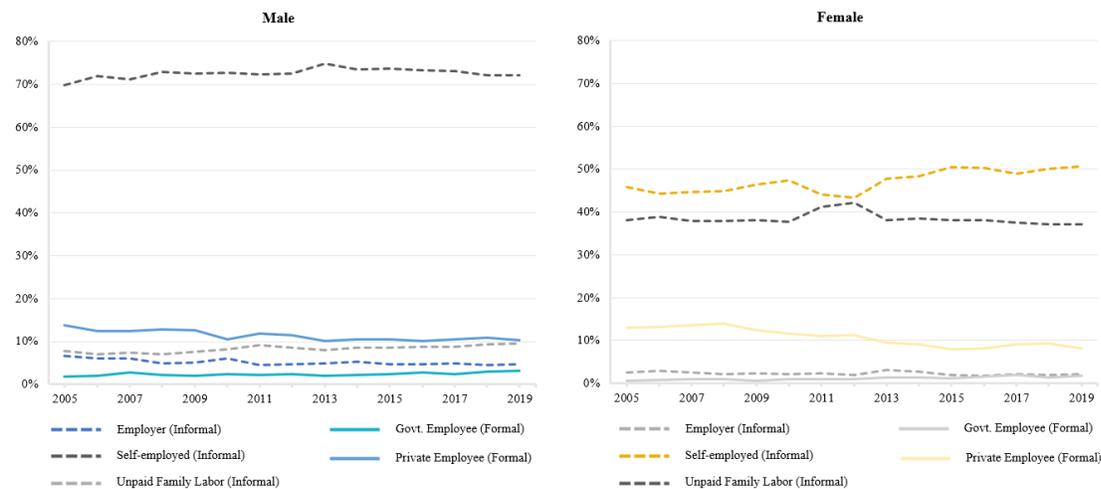
Source: Author’s calculation based on micro data from Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

Most older workers work in the informal sector. In 2019, older workers (over 60 years) were located mostly in the informal sector (86.4 percent of men versus 89.9 percent of women). Most older women are self-employed (51 percent) and unpaid family workers (37 percent), while the majority of the older men are self-employed (72 percent) (Figure 5.23). Furthermore, from 2005 to 2019, the employment status trend was quite stable, most of which was concentrated in the informal sector (Figure 5.24). Note that the official retirement age for the formal sector in Thailand is 60 years and only a few occupations (that is, judges) have an extension to 65 years; thus, for the elderly to remain in the labor market, they have to work in the informal sector.

Figure 5.23 - Employment status of older people (2019)



Source: Author’s calculation based on micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019.

Figure 5.24 - Trend of employment status of older people (2005–2019)

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from Labor Force Survey 2005–2019.

The majority of older workers (specifically, 54 percent of women and 65 percent of men) work in the agricultural sector and are concentrated in low-skill jobs (Table 5.10). Most of them live in rural areas (over 58 percent for men and women) and are concentrated in the northeast and north region. The elderly Thai (over 60 years) with a poor socioeconomic background tend to continue working compared to those from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds (United Nations Population Fund 2017).

Opportunities for social welfare access are not much different across genders within the elderly group. The current Thai pension scheme for the elderly is based on a three-pillar system (World Bank 1994). However, under the Thai social security system, workers in the informal sector have inadequate access to social security. SES2019 revealed that individual welfare received by older workers is mostly through having a UHC card followed by social pension for the elderly (Table 5.11).

Table 5.10 - Share of older workers (classified by their characteristics) (%) (2019)

Individual welfare	Informal sector		Formal sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Have universal health card	86.4	86.7	77.0	77.2
Have social pension for elderly	85.1	87.1	68.5	73.5
Have social assistance for disabled person (disabled group)	60.3	46.2	57.4	28.6

Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey 2019.

Table 5.11 - Share of older workers having social welfare benefit (%) (2019)

	Male	Female
Industry		
Agri	64.7	54.3
Manu	10.3	10.7
Service	25.0	35.0
Area		
Urban	40.7	41.8
Rural	59.3	58.2
Region		
Bangkok	9.5	9.9
Central	25.4	26.4
North	21.7	20.9
Northeast	31.8	31.0
South	11.6	11.8
Occupation		
High-skill occupations		
Managers and legislators	3.8	1.2
Professionals	1.3	1.2
Technicians	0.7	0.7
Middle-skill occupations		
Clerks	0.2	0.3
Service workers	13.0	26.8
Plant and machine operators	4.3	0.9
Low-skill occupations		
Skilled agriculture and fisheries	63.3	52.4
Craft worker	8.2	8.5
Unskilled	5.3	8.0

Source: Author's calculation based on micro data from SES 2019.

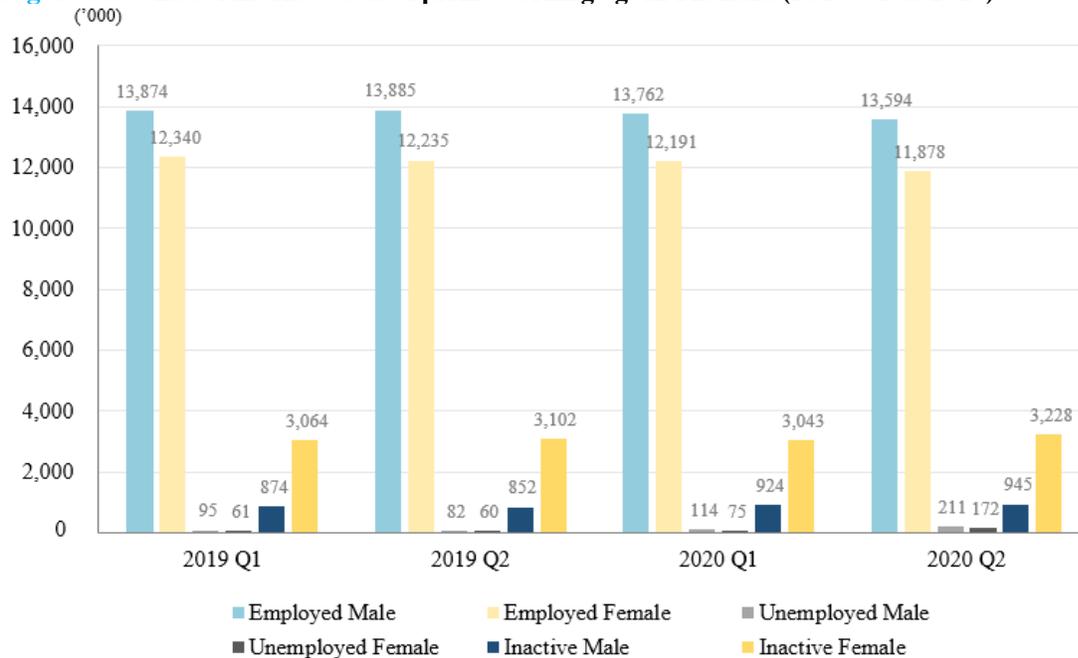
Despite the Thai Government having expanded the social security system in recent years, pension still accounts for a small portion of older people's income, especially informal workers (SOPT 2014). As a result, the elderly people's allowance has a small impact on their labor force participation (Paweenawat and Vechbanyongratana 2015); the elderly, especially those with low economic status, continue to work for their living, indicating inadequate support for them from the government (Paweenawat and Liao 2020). World Bank (2021b) conclude that even though the Old Age Assistance program in Thailand has wide coverage, the welfare received are not adequate enough to escape from poverty.

(5.6) COVID-19 Pandemic and Gender

Undoubtedly, Thailand's economy has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; the GDP of the second quarter shrank by 12.2 percent compared to 2.0 percent in the first quarter (NESDC 2020). According to the World Bank (2020e), COVID-19 has had a negative impact on Thailand's economic growth and has worsened the vulnerabilities that were evident before COVID-19.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Thai labor market started by the second quarter of 2020. The number of employed people (prime working age group - 25–54 years) decreased for both men and women, while the unemployed population increased, with women showing a higher increase in the number of people in the unemployed status (around three times more) as well as a significant increase in the inactive status (Figure 5.25).

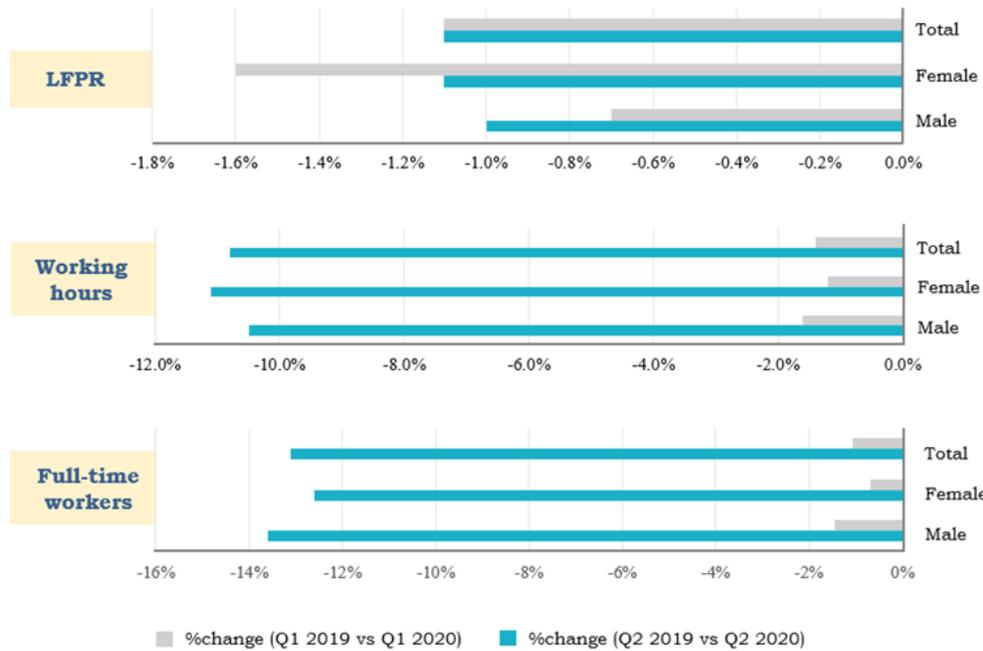
Figure 5.25 - Labor market status of prime working age in Thailand (2019 versus 2020)



Source: Author's calculation based on the micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019–2020.

Comparing the second quarter of 2019 to 2020, the COVID-19 crisis has had less impact on the LFPR than in the first quarter: there is a slight decrease in the LFPR of both men and women, and the decrease is slightly higher for women. However, in the second quarter, COVID-19 severely affected both men and women's labor supply in terms of working hours, which decreased by over 10 percent, with the decline slightly higher for women than men. World Bank (2021) found that in the first two quarters of 2020, working hours has reduced larger for women than men. Furthermore, more workers are in part-time jobs, while the share of full-time workers (working more than 35 hours a week) has dropped over 13 percent (Figure 5.26).

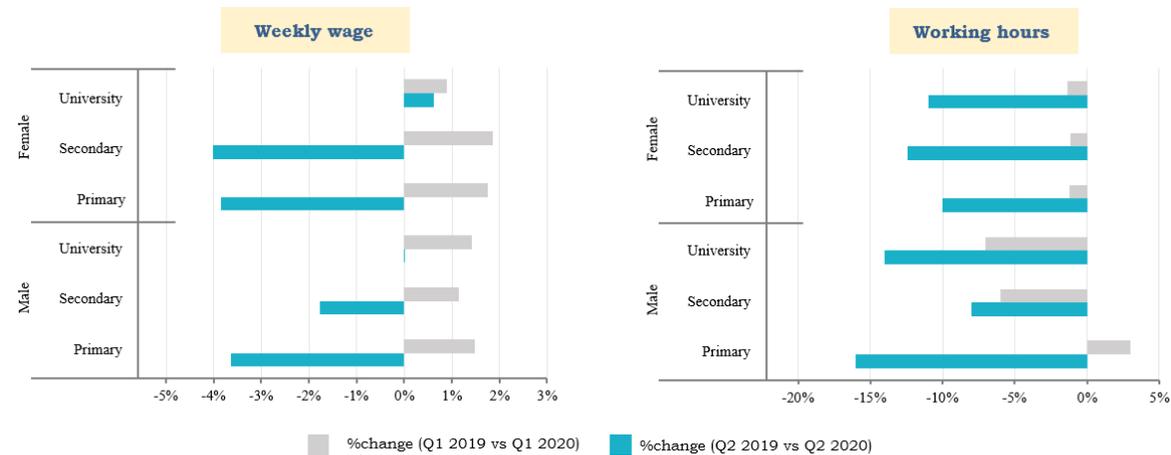
Figure 5.26 - Impact of COVID-19 on prime working age’s labor supply (2019 versus 2020)



Source: Author’s calculation based on the micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019–2020.

This COVID-19 crisis clearly shows that education is a personal safety net during the pandemic. Workers with primary education have been affected more than those with secondary and university education, with workers with university-level education having the least negative impact from COVID-19. Working hours have dropped in the second quarter of 2020 for both men and women, and men with primary-level education have been more affected (Figure 5.27). This confirms that higher levels of education can protect people during a crisis. Paweenawat and Liao (2020b) suggested that the impact of COVID-19 differs across demographic groups and workers with higher education levels suffer less impact compared to the people with lower education levels.

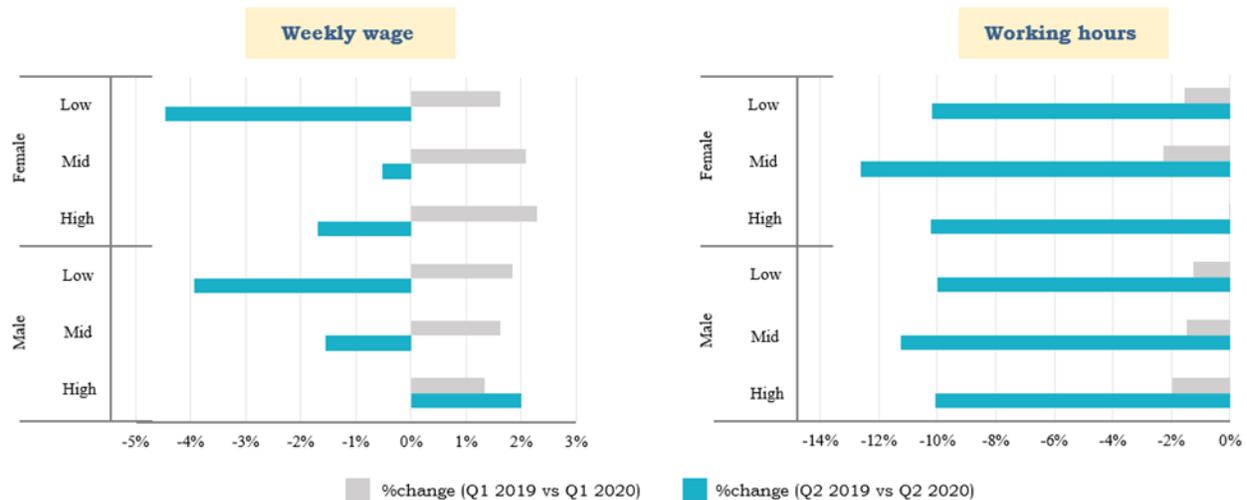
Figure 5.27 - Impact of COVID-19 on men and women’s labor supply (classified by education) (2019 versus 2020)



Source: Author’s calculation based on the micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019–2020.

COVID-19 has a higher negative impact in terms of wages and working hours for low-skilled workers. In all skills, working hours have decreased by over 10 percent for both men and women, but women with middle-level skills were affected more than men (Figure 5.28). The data shows there has been a significant reduction in full-time employment, with declines in working hours and weekly wages, implying significant increases in the numbers of under-employed workers.

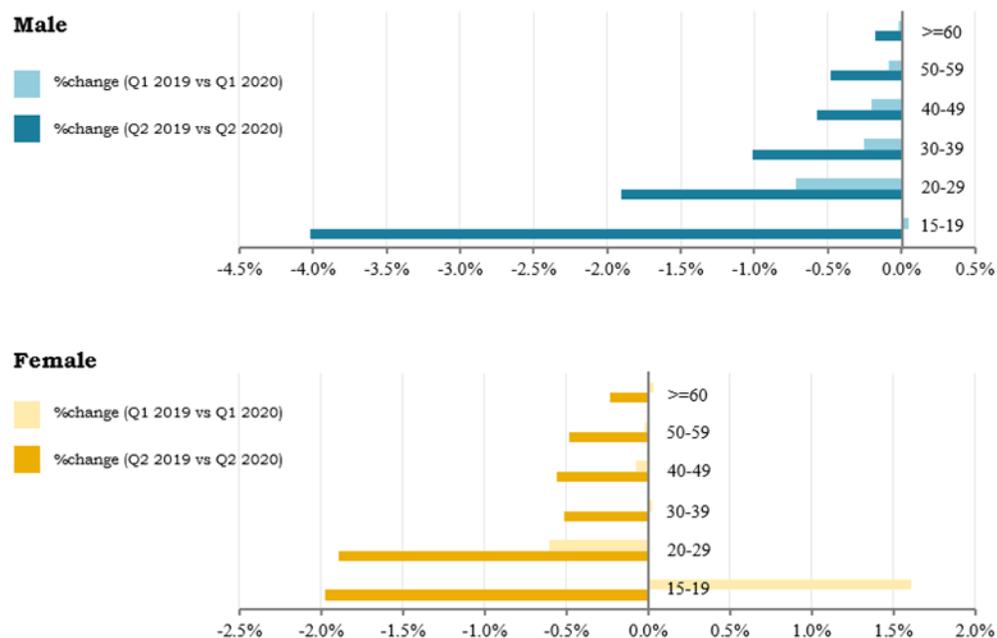
Figure 5.28 - Impact of COVID-19 on men and women’s labor supply (classified by skill) (2019 versus 2020)



Source: Author’s calculation based on the micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019–2020.

The effect of COVID-19 on the ‘lockdown generation’ has also been found in Thailand. Different age groups have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, with the older generation being less affected compared to the younger generation (Figure 5.29). Data show that younger workers’ employment has been highly negatively affected by COVID-19, while there has been a less negative impact on older workers. This finding supports the worldwide evidence by ILO (2020a) on the ‘lockdown generation’. On average, the youth (around 15–24 years) is the group that has suffered the highest impact in terms of employment from the COVID-19 pandemic. World Bank (2021c) also found that this crisis has caused an increase in the unemployment rate and a decrease in youth workers’ working hours.

Evidence on the youth in Thailand shows that new graduates seem to struggle the most in the Thai labor market as they cannot find jobs. NESDC (2020) mentioned that among Thai workers, the group that should be most worried is the newly graduated workers, who account for around 520,000 people entering the labor market during the COVID-19 crisis. According to the ASEAN youth survey (2020), Thai youth have been reported to be among those with the largest share (78 percent) of remote work and study difficulties, compared to 49 percent for those in Singapore and 48 percent in Vietnam.

Figure 5.29 - Impact of COVID-19 on men and women's labor supply (classified by age) (2019 versus 2020)

Source: Author's calculation based on the micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019–2020.

The Ministry of Labor recently launched the employment promotion program for new graduates, through which the government assists the private sector by subsidizing the graduates' compensation by 50 percent (maximum of THB 7,500 per month per person throughout the one-year employment period²⁸). However, Hirunyatrakool and Theerachivanont (2020) stated that this policy may not be enough to help new graduates in terms of coverage because the number of new graduates (around 500,000) is almost double that of the project participants (supporting 260,000 participants). Furthermore, the sustainability of this project is being questioned due to the huge fiscal burden on the government in the long term.

The negative impact on youth who graduate during a crisis will not only be felt in the short term due to a lack of employment during that period, but the utmost concern is that it will have a long-term effect on their future in terms of career paths and lifetime earnings. For example, compared to those who graduate during a good economic period, students who graduate during a crisis are more likely to start their careers at companies with poor employment conditions, that is, companies that pay below average and lack opportunities for career growth. This negatively affects the income of the labor force in the future (Oreopoulos, vonWachter, and Heisz 2012). Schwandt and Wachter (2020) mentioned this long-term impact of entering the labor market during a recession based on the evidence from the United States. Later studies found the same effect in Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria, Spain, Belgium, Norway, and Japan.

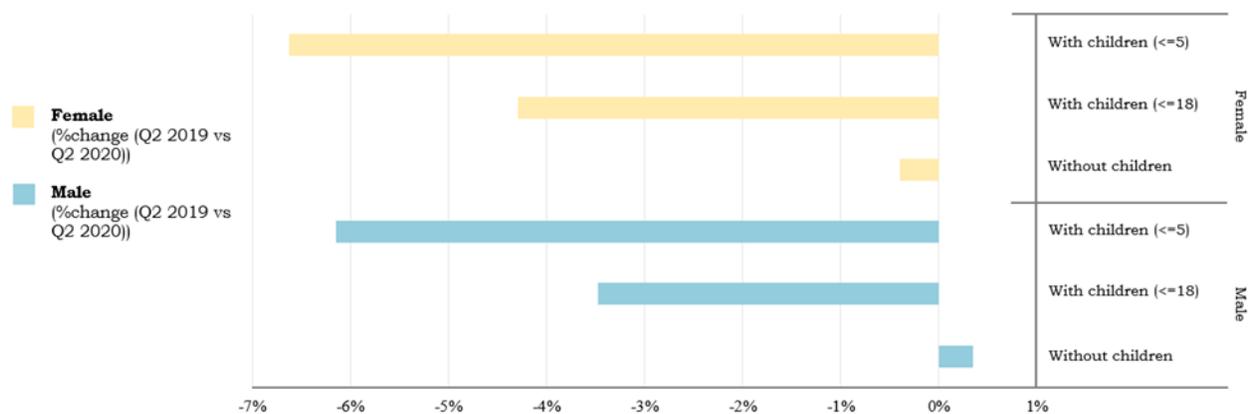
Married women with young children have been most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike prior crises, the COVID-19 pandemic management strategy has clear social distancing measures taken to combat the spread of the virus (Del Boca et al. 2020). When the Thai Government imposed lockdown measures in March 2020, there was a huge impact on labor market

²⁸ From October 1, 2020, to September 30, 2021.

participation and household living arrangements within Thai families. The lockdown policy gave rise to work-from-home arrangements by employers and school closures. The latter placed an additional burden on the Thai family, especially the mother, as the lockdown substantially affected housework and childcare.

Data clearly show that married women with young children have been most affected by the crisis in terms of employment and working hours. Having young children had a negative impact on employment in the second quarter of 2020, with women affected more than men (Figure 5.30). The negative effect is higher for those women who have young children. This finding is consistent with evidence in other countries: in Italy and the United States, women's labor supply also dropped (Del Boca et al. 2020).

Figure 5.30 - Impact of COVID-19 on men and women's labor supply (classified by parenthood status) (2019 versus 2020)

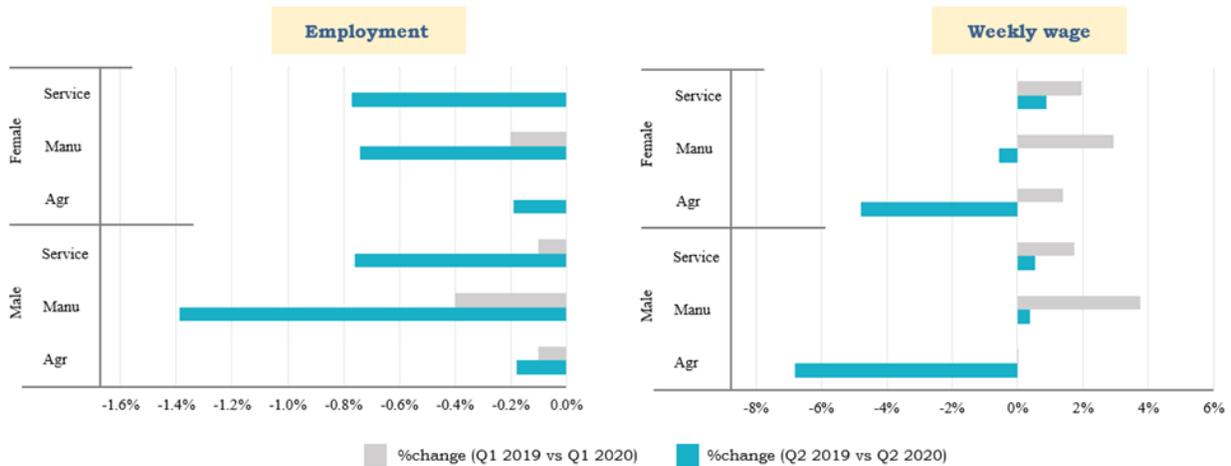


Source: Author's calculation based on the micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019–2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a greater impact on female-dominated sectors. According to the recent NESDC report (2020), the sectors that had sharply decreased in their production were mostly in the service sector, for example, accommodation and food services, transportation, wholesale, and retail trade. These sectors are female-dominated sectors in the Thai labor market, due to women's movement from being unpaid family workers in the agriculture sector to being paid workers in the service sector (Paweenawat and Liao 2019a). COVID-19 has negatively affected the labor market, causing loss of jobs and decline in working hours, especially in tourism-related sectors (World Bank 2020d).

COVID-19 started having an effect on employment and wages in the second quarter of 2020. Comparing the employment rates and wages in the second quarter of 2019 to 2020 shows a drop for both men and women. However, the male employment rate dropped most in the manufacturing sector, and the female rate dropped in the service sector. Data also show that COVID-19 has a larger negative impact on men and women in agriculture in terms of wage. However, the impact might not be only from COVID-19 but also the drought that happened recently in the country. Before COVID-19, comparing the first quarter of 2019 with the first quarter of 2020 shows that wages in each sector have increased slightly (Figure 5.31).

Figure 5.31 - Impact of COVID-19 on men and women’s labor supply (classified by sectors) (2019 versus 2020)



Source: Author’s calculation based on the micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019–2020.

When particularly focusing on the nine industries in the service sector, results suggested that women are worse off in the most affected sectors compared to men. Most women-dominated sectors are closed. The travel-related sector has been affected by COVID-19 most severely, and employment and wages have dropped dramatically, especially for women. Sectors related to accommodation and food and beverage service activities are also heavily affected during the time, with the negative effect being higher for women (Figure 5.32).

Figure 5.32 - Impact of COVID-19 on men and women’s labor supply (classified by sectors) (2019 versus 2020)



Source: Author’s calculation based on the micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019–2020.

According to ILO (2020b), among the sectors that have been negatively affected by the Covid-19, the share of men and women in manufacturing is similar, while there is higher share of women in high-impact sectors, such as retail and accommodations. Several government policies have been launched to assist workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Royal Thai government established the ‘COVID-19 Epidemic Management Centre’ in March, several measures being taken to assist the workers who are affected by the crisis, including “enhanced social security benefits, cash transfers for unemployed informal workers, tax breaks, and other actions.” However,

with the limited access to employment opportunity and government assistance, the poor households and vulnerable groups (e.g., informal workers, elderly, and disabilities) have been most affected by the pandemic and exacerbated their poverty levels due to unemployment and income loss (UNICEF, 2020). The vulnerable group has the highest poverty rate and the poverty rate for informal workers rose from 10% to 21% (World Bank, 2020d).

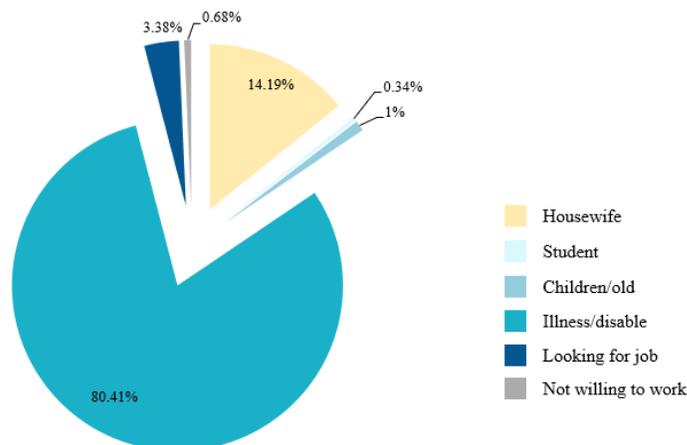
In addition to Thai workforce, Thailand has been a main destination for migrant workers from neighboring countries for over 20 years and migrant workers significantly contribute to Thailand's economy, mostly work in low-skilled jobs such as fishing, construction, and other services (ILO, 2021). By April 2021, there were 2,282,902 registered migrant workers in Thailand, mainly from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao (Office of Foreign Workers Administration, 2021). Due to Covid-19 restriction measures and economic recession in 2020, migrant workers are in the first order to be unemployed as employers reduce the workforce (ILO, 2020b). There are around 700,000 migrant workers in Thailand, majority in tourism, services, or construction sectors, who lost job since the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 (Migrant Working Group 2020). The numerous female migrant workers in Thailand are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, face barriers (such as language barriers) to accessing essential services and have also been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Chaiprakobwiriyaya et al. 2020).

(5.7) Other Issues Related to Women in Labor Market

- *Constraints for disabled women in joining the labor market*

According to the annual report of the disabled people in Thailand (National Association of the Deaf in Thailand 2018), based on the number of people with disability identity cards, there are 2,041,159 people with disabilities in Thailand (accounting for 3.08 percent of the Thai population). Disabled persons are 1,068,145 men (52 percent) and 973,014 women (47 percent).

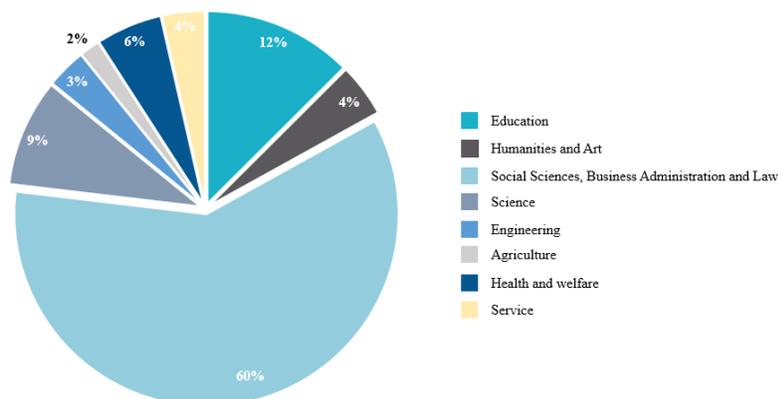
Data from the recent SES 2019 show constraints for disabled women in joining the labor market. Around 53 percent of disabled women do not work compared to 56 percent of disabled men. The main reason they reported not working is illness (81 percent); for women, the reason was being a housewife (14 percent). However, data show that 3 percent of disabled women report that they are looking for a job, which could be a good opportunity for the government to launch policies to target this group and encourage them to be in the labor market (Figure 5.33).

Figure 5.33 - Reason for not participating in the labor market (2019)

Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from SES 2019.

- *A small number of women workers graduated in STEM fields*

Globally, women are still underrepresented in STEM fields. While there are a limited number of women in STEM field in Asia, Thailand has a relatively higher rate of women in STEM (51 percent) compared to other countries (UNESCO 2017a). However, current data extracted from the labor force survey in 2020 revealed that while a majority of women workers are graduating in the field of social science, business administration, and law (around 60 percent of total women), only 18 percent of working women in Thailand are graduating with a STEM degree (Figure 5.34).

Figure 5.34 - Women's employment and field of study (2020)

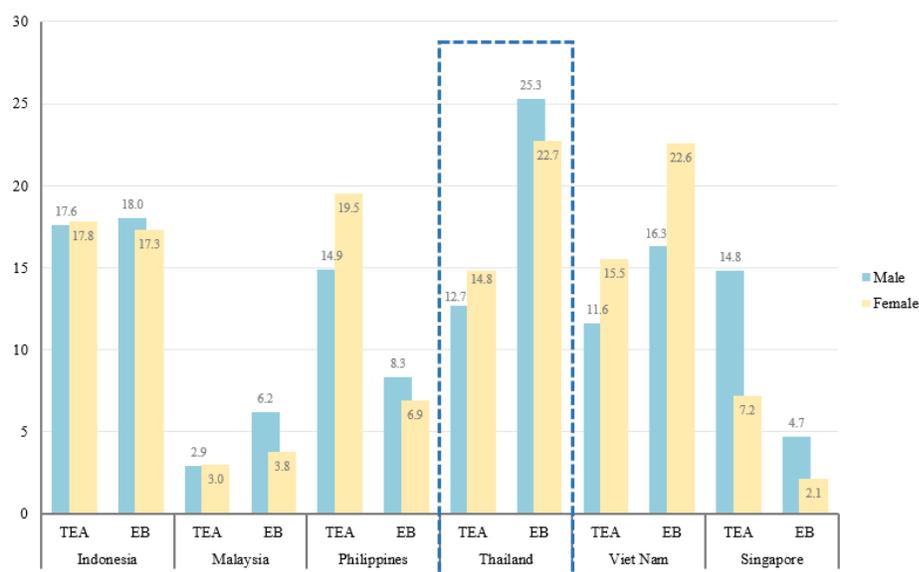
Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Labor Force Survey 2020.

According to ILO (2019), 44 percent of women's employment in STEM is at high risk of being lost due to automation in Thailand, and women are more likely to be influenced by disruptions than men, as their jobs require fewer skills. To tackle this problem, the Department of Skills Development (DSD) and the ILO have collaborated to develop STEM-related skills training for women in the labor force. Furthermore, in 2020, the Ministry of Education in Thailand and the United Nations worked together to promote gender equality and boost STEM education for girls and younger women.

• *Women Entrepreneurship in Thailand*

There are around 2.5 million small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Thailand. Almost 50 percent are run by women, and the number of Thai women owning their own business is even higher than men (Intaratat 2020). In Thailand, many businesses are owned by women, and the total early stage entrepreneurial activity among females (14 percent) is higher than that of males (12 percent) (GEM²⁹). Furthermore, compared to other ASEAN countries, Thai women have the highest rate of established businesses at 23 percent (Figure 5.35).

Figure 5.35 - Total early-stage entrepreneurial activity (TEA) rates versus established business (EB) rates (2015)



Source: ES CAP based on Xavier, S. R. et al. 2016. *ASEAN Regional Entrepreneurship Report 2015/2016*.

However, IFC (2014) notes that 70 percent of SMEs owned by women in developing countries lack financial services, such that the total credit gap is around US\$287 billion. The credit gap for female entrepreneurs is approximately US\$25 billion in Thailand, which is around 60 percent of the total gap in credit for micro and SMEs.

(5.8) Constraints to Women's Work

Household responsibilities. Thai women are expected to be the primary care providers in their households, and when compared to male family members, they tend to bear more of the burden of household responsibilities. The main constraint that hinders Thai women's participation in the labor market is their household responsibilities. Of workers who were not participating in the labor force in 2019, around 87.3 percent of prime-working-age women reported that housework was the main cause for their withdrawal from labor market participation. Only 16.3 percent of men reported this reason; rather, sickness or disability was the main reason for men not being able to work (53.8 percent) (Table 5.12).

²⁹ <https://www.gemconsortium.org/>.

Table 5.12 - Reason for not participating in the labor market (%) (2018–2019)

	Male	Female	Total
Housework	16.39	87.33	73.11
Study	1.13	0.27	0.44
Waiting for the season	2.56	0.31	0.76
Sick, disabled, etc., until unable to work	53.82	7.77	17
Rest	21.55	2.58	6.39
Other	4.54	1.74	2.3

Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Thailand Labor Force Survey (2018–2019).

The labor participation of Thai women has been impeded by their being the primary providers of childcare and elderly care. Liao and Paweenawat (2020a) found that there exists an LFPR gap among married working women without children, those with young children younger than the age of five, and those with children five years or older. According to their findings, while the LFPR gap between those with young children and older children was constant (around 6 percent), the gap between those with young children and those without children has grown. This growth was particularly evident in 1985–2016.

In addition to taking care of their own children, taking care of elderly people is another major reason drawing women away from work. Thailand is becoming an aging society, leading to an increasing share of extended families in the country. Over 50 percent of the Thai elderly reside with at least one married child,³⁰ and most family caregivers for the elderly in Thai households are women (Tamdee et al. 2019). Studies have suggested that Thai women increasingly bear the responsibility of caring for those household members who are dependent, such as the elderly and young children (Richter and Havanon 1994; Richter 1996).

For those who are already in the workforce, a higher share of household chores in the family could restrain female workers from engaging in paid work and limit their career progression. Despite the fact that Thai women have a relatively high labor participation rate, there are constraints on women in the labor market, including the motherhood penalty, glass ceiling, poor quality of employment in informal sectors, and limited accessibility of loans.

Motherhood penalty. Due to the limited support available to women with children, such as maternity leave, working mothers face many obstacles in the labor market (Waldfogel 1998). In Thailand, paid maternity leave is still low compared to other developed countries. According to the WBL index (2020) Thailand scores only 20 out of 100 on the parenthood indicator—which

³⁰ <http://www.nso.go.th/sites/2014en/Pages/survey/Social/Demographic,%20Population%20and%20Housing/The-Survey-Of-Elderly-In-Thailand.aspx>.

measures laws affecting women's work during and after pregnancy—whereas other ASEAN countries score higher. For example, the Philippines and Vietnam score 80 out of 100.³¹

Mothers in Thailand hardly achieve a work-life balance due to the country's lack of appropriate childcare support and proper childcare facilities. In addition, Thailand has no flexible working hours arrangement for mothers, causing some to draw back from the labor market, while others reduce their working hours, causing the motherhood wage penalty and difficulties in achieving their career goals. Evidence from the COVID-19 crisis indicates that married women with young children have been the most affected by the pandemic, which suggests a worsened motherhood penalty, thus hindering gender equality. Liao and Paweenawat (2020a) indicated that married women who have children and live with their parents or their spouses' families tend to have a higher probability of participating in the labor market and extending their working hours. This implies that the presence of proper childcare support encourages more women to join the labor market.

Glass ceiling. Thai women have made remarkable progress in becoming a larger share of the workforce in the formal sector; however, Thai women still lag behind men in terms of access to opportunities and promotions. Thai women in the workplace, both in the public and private sectors, still seem to encounter a glass ceiling, which hinders their progression from entry-level management positions to senior/high-ranking management levels, where decisions are made. One main career barrier for Thai women to advance their career and leadership roles is the societal and traditional norms that Thai women are expected to be the main family caregivers (Paweenawat and Liao 2019).

Conflict Management Club (2012) indicated that even though gender discrimination in Thailand was slightly decreasing due to the law, stereotypical attitudes that women should take traditionally feminine jobs, such as nursing and teaching, could restrict their perceptions of their physical and psychological abilities. For example, in the public sector, there are no female students accepted to study at the Royal Police Cadet Academy (RPCA), and women are restricted to low-level support positions in the Thai military. These are clear examples of the existing glass ceiling women face in the public sector in Thailand.

Women in the informal sector. A large proportion of Thai women works in the agricultural and informal sectors, have much less access to social security, and live in poverty. Even though the Thai Government has launched regulations to promote the rights of employees in the agricultural sector through the Ministry of Labor (Labor Protection in the Agricultural Sector), the effectiveness of the regulation may be limited as workers are usually employed for less than 180 days such that they are not entitled to the benefits stipulated by the regulation (Kongtip et al. 2015).

³¹ The parenthood indicator contains following questions: Is paid leave of at least 14 weeks available to mothers? Does the government administer 100 percent of maternity leave benefits? Is there paid leave available to fathers? Is there paid parental leave? Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?

In Thailand, women have 98 days of maternity leave, in which 100 percent of the salary is paid for the first 45 days of leave and 50 percent for the latter half by social security. However, the benefit is relatively low compared to other ASEAN countries. For example, in the Philippines, female workers have 105 days of maternity leave paid at 100 percent of their average daily salary, while in Vietnam, women have six months of paid maternity leave.

Even informal employees in the non-agricultural sector, such as those working for retail stores or street stalls, have limited access to social security: only two-thirds of them have social security (BOT 2019). Furthermore, there are more women than men in the informal sector due to women's preference for flexible work, allowing them to take care of the household and children, and discrimination against women (Aemkulwat 2014). The laws protecting workers in the informal sector are generally ineffective due to inadequate enforcement and informal employees not having contracts or lack of knowledge about their rights (Kongtip et al. 2018).

In addition to the lack of social security, the poor quality of employment in informal sectors is a chronic problem that remains unresolved by the government. While most formal workers work at the establishment/office/shop of the employer, informal workers are dispersed across workplaces, and the majority of them reported to be working in plantation areas (Table 5.13).

For example, the recent survey of TDRI (2020) on the highway installation vendors in the Northeastern region revealed that this group of informal workers faces financial instability and uncertainty about their daily earnings and being exposed to health risks due to hazardous working environments. Furthermore, on average, their working hours are around 10 hours a day (or 70 hours a week), which is much longer than required by labor protection laws.

Table 5.13 - Workplace of workers in formal and informal sectors (%)

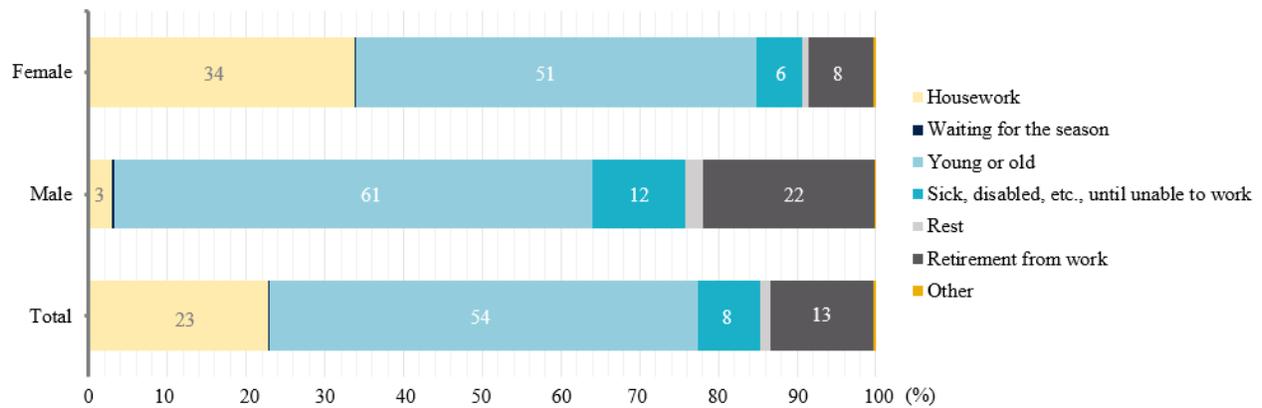
	Informal		Formal	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Own establishment / office / shop	4.0	3.9	4.2	3.8
Establishment / office / shop of the employer	4.9	4.5	42.3	42.4
Stalls on the street / in the market	3.6	5.0	0.4	0.5
Construction site	5.1	1.0	1.1	0.2
Own residence or residential area	7.8	9.5	0.8	1.4
Employer's residence	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.4
Unsecured Workplace	4.3	1.4	1.0	0.1
Plantation area	23.5	18.6	0.3	0.3
Other	1.2	0.2	0.3	0.1

Source: Author's calculations based on micro data from Informal Employment Survey 2017–2019.

Limited accessibility of loans for women. While there are several microcredit programs focusing on reducing poverty in Thailand, such as the Village fund and the People's Bank Program by the Government Savings Bank, only the WEF specifically focuses on improving the economic employment of women and only 29 percent of WEF members report their gains from the fund (Suwanasart 2019). In addition, Thai females in SME businesses face many barriers in accessing funding in Thailand due to high collateral conditions and the low rate of acceptance. Aterido, Beck, and Iacovone (2013) suggested that the gender gap in accessing financial services has a negative effect on the economy, as it worsens income inequality. Other than financing, female business owners also face a lack of service support in accessing the internet, training, and markets. Thus, to empower women, it is recommended that e-commerce be used as a tool to make work more accessible and bring female traders closer to the markets (International Trade Centre 2017).

Elderly participation. Besides being too old (reported by 52 percent of older people), the reason for older people not working is different for older men and women, with household work being the main reason for women (51 percent). Less than 3 percent of men are not working due to household work, and the majority (60 percent) report that they are too old. In Thailand, two-thirds of older people co-reside with their children.³² Adhikari, Soonthorndhada, and Haseen (2011) found that elderly females who co-reside with their children tend to not participate in the labor market, while Liao and Paweenawat (2020b) found that after having children, Thai adult children tend to move back home to live with their parents for childrearing support. Thus, ‘grandparenting’ and assisting with household chores may prevent elderly females from participating in the labor market (Figure 5.36).

Figure 5.36 - Older people’s reasons to not work (2019)



Source: Author’s calculation based on micro data from Labor Force Survey 2019.

³² <http://www.nso.go.th/sites/2014en/Pages/survey/Social/Demographic,%20Population%20and%20Housing/The-Survey-Of-Elderly-In-Thailand.aspx>.

(6) Policy Recommendation and National priorities

Thailand is becoming an aged society and will become a super-aged society by 2035. The decreasing share of the working-age population will inevitably cause a shrinkage of the Thai workforce, which will certainly affect the country's productivity and economic growth. Fully using the existing workforce and bringing back the underused population (like women and the elderly) should be a national priority in alleviating the problem. The Thai Government should have policies targeting women throughout the different stages of their working lives, not only encouraging their participation but also fully using their capabilities and qualifications in the labor market.

- (1) **Improvements to the accessibility of quality childcare/elderly care services in Thailand could be the most significant tool in increasing the female participation rate.** Full assistance should be made available to women with children to fully use their capabilities and enable them to pursue continuous careers. The government should provide proper public childcare facilities for parental support, especially affordable public and private childcare, creating the conditions and environment for better work-life balance and subsidized childcare services, or provide tax exemption as an incentive for the private sector to provide this facility to their workers, as well as promote flexible working hours/workplaces.
- (2) **Since the majority of Thai women and older workers are in informal sectors and low-paid occupations, the government must extend the social security protection coverage to this group and provide better working conditions and environments, as well as training³³ to enhance women's capabilities.** Furthermore, given the current uncertainty and further challenges triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, workers in the informal sector in Thailand are facing an unprecedented crisis. The government's policy to support their livelihoods has become more essential than before. Thus, the government should provide further assistance and continue to focus on vulnerable workers during the crisis.
- (3) **The government should also focus on promoting equal working environments, including highlighting women's right to work, and encouraging the eradication of the glass ceiling women face in the workplace.** Although Thai women have a higher employment share in both the public and private sectors, they can only progress up to entry- and low-level management positions. The decision-making positions continue to be dominated by men. A gender diversity policy, which should include aspects such as gender quotas in the boardroom, should be implemented and enforced by the government.
- (4) **There is high involvement in ICT access and E-commerce activities among the young generation of Thai women.** An improvement in digital infrastructure, internet access and promotion of technical/literacy skills to help young women could provide new opportunities for empowerment, eliminate work barriers, and close gender gaps in all areas.

³³ Formal training is officially provided by the government such as programs organized by the Ministry of Labor. Informal training could be on-the-job training, which is informally arranged by enterprises.

Likewise, older people who have no access to the internet and lack knowledge/technical skills, especially those in rural areas, require additional government support in ICT access.

- (5) **The longer older people remain in the labor market, the more contribution they can make to the country.** The government must actively encourage older workers' participation in the labor market. To solve the country's decreasing workforce, the government must extend the official retirement age and eligibility age for claiming old age pension to expand and keep elderly workers in high-skill jobs and in the formal sector. Providing more incentive schemes for older pension could also induce workers to work longer. This coverage should be extended to the elderly in the informal sector.
- (6) **The COVID-19 crisis clearly hit women hard, especially mothers, due to the lack of proper childcare services in both public and private facilities.** Without a policy targeted at helping this group of women, this crisis may further widen the parenthood wage gap and later worsen the progress toward gender equality. Therefore, a policy that makes provisions for support services for female workers to survive through this crisis is needed.
- (7) **Youth have also been hit hard by the ongoing crisis and the impact on them goes beyond short-term effects on unemployment to a long-term impact on their future earning and career path.** Thus, in addition to the special program that is assisting them find jobs, the government should consider an additional program to enhance their skills. This way, new graduates and workers can develop their potential capabilities and learn advanced/necessary new working skills to augment the ease of finding jobs in the future (post the COVID-19 pandemic).
- (8) **Thai women are traditionally viewed as the main household care providers. To improve gender equality, this traditional belief should be changed by encouraging men to provide more childcare and perform household chores.** Furthermore, an improvement in greater parity between maternity and paternity leave could also encourage a change of gender norms on parenting in the country. From the global comparison, Thailand scores lower in the parenthood indicator, including fewer paternity leaves and benefits. For example, Thailand does not have paternity leave for fathers in the private sector. In addition, it is also important to build and strengthen education about gender equality at schools to diminish the existing gender stereotypes and cultural-traditional norms in Thailand, which will benefit the future generations.
- (9) **The country needs laws and policies to incorporate gender-sensitive and responsive measures to tackle marine plastic production, waste management, and related health and safety issues.** Women are among the highest risk groups of the climate change and are important stakeholders on reducing plastics and handling waste disposal. The government should work with development partners in developing gender-responsive disaster management, including gender aspects in climate-related prevention, mitigation, and adaptation policies and programs especially for women.

- (10) **The government should strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations and local public agencies in the conflict-affected Deep South of Thailand to address gender issues, including participation of women in planning and decision-making, addressing grievances for men and women affected by the conflict.** Conflict resulted in over 3,000 widows and 7,000 orphans suffering due to these sudden increased burdens. The government should help these women in the transition period and provide aid programs to support their physical and mental health.
- (11) **The government should support and encourage women leaders in the private sector to improve children and elderly care services, and related regulations to enhance women's participation in the country's workforce.** Thailand performs very well in women's representation in key decision-making positions in the private sector, as compared to other countries globally and in the region. Women on boards and senior management can affect changes in companies' policies and procedures to further increase the share of women working and to introduce employee benefits and facilities for childcare, paternity, and parental leave. It is important to recognize and take advantage of the country's strengths in this regard.

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